



Stop Making Sense: Questioning Morality through Examination of Style, Structure, and Substance in Historical Fiction

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English III, American Literature

Keywords: Style, Structure, Morality, Close-Reading, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: “Stop Making Sense” is a ten-day unit which will be taught as a part of the eleventh grade English curriculum, but can be adapted to twelfth grade as well. This unit seeks to uncover how we make sense of our world through examination of the relationship among style, structure, and substance in fiction. With a focus on close reading, students will explore techniques to help them understand the deeper meaning of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse—Five*. Though this is a unit that focuses on examination of fiction, the strategies used for close reading will be helpful across curricula. This unit exposes students to ethical dilemmas and aims to aide in a student’s ability to make tough choices in the present and future. This unit will provide students with strategies for close reading and rhetorical analysis, as well as practice in narrative writing, argumentative writing, and expository writing.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 120 students in Honors English III, American Literature.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

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Style, Structure, and Substance in Historical Fiction*

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“Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.” – Albert Camus

Introduction

Camus’s admission above signifies a paradox among readers. If all fiction is an intimate, if not embellished, portrayal of reality, then how are we to perceive history through literature? How are we to parse out the veracity and authenticity of traumatic testimony? What are the ethical ramifications of authoring true lies? These questions haunt readers of historical narratives. And when style, structure, and substance collide, we as readers are confronted with the possibility of our beliefs turning upside down. I am not above loving immoral characters, as long as they are just that—characters on a page in a book. I, like many others, enjoy watching a character act as I could not. Why? Because it is much more interesting. It is this aberration that draws readers into a book in the first place. It does not seem often enough that students are confronted with questions of morality that do not stem from some blind authority. I am guilty of this too, I will admit. When reading complex works, I try to assess myself according to what I can decipher on the page. When confronted with a conflicting belief, I have to force myself to stop and think “do I disagree?” It is this internal conflict that makes a work of literature beautiful and surprising. Camus suggests that fiction is the best way to highlight truth that cannot otherwise be seen without a moral clash. By extension, fiction worth reading—fiction that is beautiful and surprising—should be labelled as dangerous to our morals. I believe that it is this dangerous literature that makes not only stronger readers but stronger moral agents.

Through examination of style, structure, and substance in historical fiction, readers become moral arbiters. It is through style that we become morally affected; through structure that we evolve or devolve with the characters; through language that we are drawn in emotionally. Without the close reading demanded by such morally-charged and threatening texts, we remain stagnant in our moral arbitration. Without mindfully completing this task, we send bereft agents toward careless citizenship.

Where does this leave me? I want students to be prepared for the ethical battles they will encounter in the graduation from adolescence to adulthood. I want students to be able to negotiate complex language and thought in the real world. In this unit, students will be able to identify ethical dilemmas in complex texts through close reading, and be able to provide textual evidence and support for arbitration.

Background

I am a teacher at William Amos Hough High School in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) System. Hough has approximately 2,200 students of which I teach 160 yearly, most of whom are eleventh graders. I teach English III; two sections of standard and four sections of honors. The English III curriculum focuses on American Literature, with an emphasis on research and the Graduation Project, a two year project adopted by CMS to help students prepare for self-guided research in college. My students are at a critical point in their academics and life experience, which gives me the opportunity to challenge their thinking. This generation of students are overwhelmed with testing and college prep, and are answer obsessed. They devote little care or emphasis to meaning, importance, or discovery of an answer. The *answer* becomes this match-point in the furthering of career success, and is in every way inauthentic. It is a constant battle and becomes increasingly difficult to discuss strong writing and style in a discipline that is not merely seen as not strictly empirical, but also as entirely subjective. To English teachers this affront is a blight. I cannot be the lone English teacher to admit to black and white responses, yet there is a spectrum from right to wrong when it comes to writing and argumentation, from a weak argument to a strong one. This is tough for students to see. So, naturally, students graft to subjectivity and its false promise that “all answers are right answers.”

While I do not wish to predicate my lessons on such negativity, I confess to conflict. I want my students to want to think, and I want to think that my students want to think. In fact, it upsets me when students show a refusal in using the things that makes each of them so interesting—their brains. So often, I will have the class talk to one another about what they have just read or write a response to something that they read. I meet with confused faces: “what do you want us to discuss?” Teacher response: “Discuss what you just read.” Student response: “Well, yeah, but what about it?” This tells me that students are not reading, they are merely looking at a page without direction. They are not being forced to question themselves. I want them to get more comfortable with knowing that they cannot and often will not have the answer as quickly as they wish for it. They must discover answers through close reading. I do not mean to say that I am the only English teacher who wishes this, and that this is even strictly a problem among English teachers. This problem is insidious and affects all teachers.

I want to encourage students to think about their views and about how they came to hold those views and beliefs.

Art of Fiction Seminar

This seminar has been paramount in my understanding of what it means to close read a text. Initially, I was overwhelmed. I did not think that it was a concept that could really be taught, though as an English teacher I desperately hoped that it could be. Luckily, the seminar provided me with great strategies to teach a better concept of close reading. Close reading means more than pointing out metaphors and figurative language; it means

reading, rereading, questioning, and finding patterns within a text. For me and my students, it is best described as *slow* reading.

Content Objectives

I want my students to develop a sense of author's purpose as grasped through style, structure, and substance in fiction which touches on Common Core Standard RL.11-12.5. We will use non-fiction texts to supplement our understanding of the various ethical dilemmas which surround the fiction texts assigned adhering to RI.11-12.3 and RI.11-12.6. Students will read, analyze, and evaluate the effectiveness of a given novel based on its style and structure (RL.11-12.6). Students will be able to evaluate the author's stylistic choices for their effectiveness in relation to making moral claims in literature. The culminating assessment for "Stop Making Sense" will be a Juxtaposition Project. This project will assess a student's ability to read non-print texts as rhetoric, examining the relationship among style, structure, and substance. This unit is intended for Honors English III students and will last approximately ten class days.

Learning Goals

This unit will focus on examining the relationship among style, structure, and substance in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Through examination, students will be able to conclude how style and structure are influenced by the sensitive ethical dilemmas presented.

Rationale

"Books can be dangerous. The best ones should be labeled 'This could change your life.'" – Helen Exley

Touchy Subjects

Conflict, in both a story and a reader, makes for great literature and conversation. But what do I do with the literature that is offensive—that demands to be read and discussed—in a culture obsessed with not stepping on the toes of others? My goal is not to offend, but rather to ignite thought, and often times this takes a little passion and conflict. Like Exley, I believe that a function of great literature is to be dangerous, questionable, and truth-telling, even if the truth is offensive.

How can we teach morally charged literature? First, it would be helpful to initiate a fully collaborative space. Prime parents and students for a departure from safe and conventional literature into an aberration. Letting parents know that just because a text is assigned does not mean that I as the teacher promote all ideas that the text contains.

For this unit, it is the history—our schema—coupled with the narrative technique that make these novels, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, offensive. Arbitrating this student/parental/administrative push-back will be tough. This is why the first action must be to prime as well as letting parents know that the goal is learning and developing personal acumen. This is best accomplished when a learner's schema is displaced and learner experiences a productive discomfort. It is this cognitive dissonance that pushes learners to adapt and grow.

I believe that students who are forced to weigh the morality of a book against their own, are the better and will become successful in the future arbitration that comes with impending adulthood. It is the piecing together of information and evaluation of how we as learners make sense of our world that is paramount to me as a teacher.

Teaching *Slaughterhouse-Five*

I intend to lead a group Honors English III students through this book as a whole-class study. Students will read this novel entirely on their own time before the first day of instruction in this unit. Students should follow the timeline, elucidated below in the daily instruction section of this paper. Given the unconventional structure of this novel, I do not want students to be left entirely on their own to read the novel without appropriate guidance; I will give students questions to guide their reading. These questions also appear below in the daily instruction section. If they were to read this on their own, most students would not be able to pick out the important sections that connect the seemingly disconnected story together. It is my desire to aide this process by giving them insights and things to look for to be able to do this on their own toward the end of the unit.

Why Slaughterhouse-Five? *Slaughterhouse-Five* gives a unique and untold testimony about a soldier's experience before, during, and after WWII. The style, often deadpan and darkly humorous, combined with an absolute dismissal of chronological storytelling creates a bizarre, poignant, and challenging experience for the reader. Its unconventionality encourages readers to continue reading, which is huge for high school students. The challenges this novel presents manifest in theme, which is largely due to the structure of the novel. If my intention is to get students to understand authorial design and the connections among style, structure, and substance, then I can think of no better novel than Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Kurt Vonnegut inserts himself as a character—also a writer—to narrate this story. Because this is a novel essentially inside another a novel, the structure almost acts like a character itself. As a class, we will examine how structuring the novel this way highlights authorial design. The most educational piece to this work is arguably the constant questioning both within the text and within the reader. This is due to the structure that jumps backwards and forwards through time as a means to illustrate a fractured experience. We as readers are to question everything as protagonist Billy Pilgrim does.

Time after time, Vonnegut injects Billy into scenes that are distorted and questionable. Vonnegut does not do this purely for didactic reasons (this is simply what war does to the people involved in it) but rather to show that we all have some sort of fracture ourselves. This is where Vonnegut begins to challenge our morality as readers. As a teacher, I want my students to be challenged in this way.

While *Slaughterhouse-Five* does at times contain offensive language and graphic passages about life as a prisoner of war, this novel is important. Any reader who accepts the challenge of this book will be forced to think about his or her clashing views and evaluate the effectiveness of the work. This skill will benefit future arbitration.

Teaching *Time's Arrow*

I intend to teach sections of this novel, in conjunction with *Slaughterhouse-Five*. I will teach this to the same group of Honors English III students, and I will use the text for a whole class study. We will read sections of this after the class has read Vonnegut to compare the style and structure of both works. This novel is easily comparable given that the brief section in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is told backwards—where ugliness and horror transform into beauty and wonder—inspired Amis's style in this novel.

The specific sections that I want my students to read highlight Amis' craft and storytelling. I want to compare not only the authors' styles, but also how each author forces his reader to the point of discomfort and makes him or her question his or her morality. Amis's novel is not an American classic—but his backwards storytelling accentuates his purpose for writing and hence the book is valuable addition to the syllabus.

In his essay "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," James Phelan argues for the value of teaching literature that is morally challenging. He adds that "some authors have gifts of insight, empathy, and aesthetic power that most readers do not and that therefore it is in our interests" to listen and question what each have to say.¹ Among these authors is Martin Amis.

Amis's novel focuses on the life of a man from the moment of his death to his birth. Readers are left confused as to why his story is being played backwards and how the narrator remains utterly clueless. The life of the main character, Odilo Unverdorben, is misguidedly narrated by Odilo's detached "Soul." As readers, we must decipher what the "Soul" is telling us. Because the story is told backwards, effect becomes cause, actions lose their meaning, letters to friends and lovers are taken from the trash and the ink soaked back up into the pen. Naturally, this is confusing. This is purposeful. Just as we are confused, so too is the "Soul".

Phelan acknowledges two kinds of readers—“flesh and blood readers (each of us in his or her own subjectivity) and [...] the authorial audience (the implied reader [...] for whom the narrative is designed).”ⁱⁱ This recognition affirms a reader’s allowance for emotional reactions to texts, and in the case of *Time’s Arrow*, emotional reactions are appropriate. It is important that students understand that these reactions are acceptable and “[allow] us to consider both the benefits of seeking to enter the authorial audience and the necessity of moving back outside that audience and evaluating our experiences within it.”ⁱⁱⁱ Once we can establish the two sides of every reader, which Phelan calls our “readerly dynamics,” we can move forward in understanding how they affect the progression of a narrative.

Phelan argues that the progression is further affected by:

The ethics of the told and the ethics of the telling. The ethics of the told involve the ethical judgments we make about characters. [...] The ethics of the telling involve the values underlying the narrative transmission—both from the implied author and from the narrators.^{iv}

Here, Phelan suggests that the two come together to influence our understanding of a text. This is critical in deciphering the tone and overall meaning of a text.

Phelan notes the position of a narrator as having three jobs: reporting, reading, and regarding situations, all of which the “Soul” delivers unreliably.^v By Amis employing an unreliable narrator, he creates distance between the flesh and blood reader and Odilo.^{vi}

It is this inventive and inspired narration that highlights Amis’s purpose. He is telling a story that is painfully familiar, the events of the Holocaust. His goal is to disorient readers, to detach them from their schema so as to get them to understand fully the horrors of the Holocaust. Amis employs the detached Soul of a Nazi doctor to describe Odilo’s creation of a race, rather than the destruction of one. While this is jarring and stomach turning, as everything being described is miserably distorted, Amis forces his readers to question and think about the atrocities that are uncomfortable to consider. Because the Holocaust is something that we are taught throughout our student careers, lives become numbers and thus numb the pain of what really occurred. The calamity loses meaning when we are told over and over again in the same way. Amis’s novel cuts through this numbness by highlighting the horrors in the Holocaust and “undoing” the injustice.

Due to the nature of the content, coupled with the storytelling, this novel may lead to emotional discomfort. As a result, parents might ask for their children to read a different novel in its place. This novel does take risks, but it is my view that the novel is effective and in no way glorifies war or destruction. If parents wish to opt out of this novel, students will instead read O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*.

Strategies

Think, Pair, Share, Return

I do this as a form of process writing. The goal is to allow the student time to process a complex question rather than being forced to respond straight away. This also encourages students to move away from a quick answer, usually from the teacher or the ever-participating student. Students will write a personal reflection or a response to a complex question. It is important here to understand that the initial student response is not judged or graded. Rather, it functions as a stepping stone. I time the first step with music. Students are asked to respond in writing (bulleted lists, bubble charts, paragraph, etc.) when the music begins and are to write until the music stops. This encourages students to write more for themselves than a teacher because they do not know when the music will stop. Then students will turn and discuss their initial thoughts with a partner, while jotting down their partner's ideas. I usually do this with music on to abate any nervousness of being the first individual to speak. When the music stops for the second time, students will partner up with another student and discuss the prompt, and once again write down critical points. When students have met with a total of three individuals they will return to their seats and the teacher will initiate a discussion among the whole class. Following the class discussion, students will return to their writing and produce more critical and thoughtful responses with appropriate textual support. This strategy is great for promoting and building individual thought.

Silent Seminar

Students pair up, with their desks side by side. The instructor places large sheets of parchment paper on the desk with a short selection from a text taped to it. Students will read it silently and annotate the text. The goal is collaborative explication. Communication is non-verbal and must be written. This helps students with processing a work carefully. Upon completion, groups rotate to read the various passages and student explications. Students are encouraged to further the explications and comment using sticky notes. Everything is silent with only written communication.

Finding Voice: Mimicking Style

In this exercise, students are asked to mimic an author's style in a creative writing assignment. This could be in the form of an additional scene in a text or something more personal.

Four Corners

This allows students to get out of their chairs and move around the room. In this exercise, students will be prompted with a complex question to which they must respond with strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Each response will have a dedicated

corner. This allows students to observe and understand the views of others. When each student has selected a corner, they will discuss their response as a group and share those responses with the class, as they try to get others to join them.

Interactive Reading

As a way to promote critical reading, students will annotate a specific passage. This could also be in the form of two-sided notes, where the left side of the notes detail student questions about the passage, and the right provides responses and reflections for the corresponding questions.

Exit Tickets

I have my students submit Exit Tickets on their way out of the classroom and these tickets influence my lesson the next day. Students receive them in the last five minutes of class and the tickets pertain to a topic or objective that we discussed that day. I find that because the tickets are not for a grade, students are less concerned with getting the “right” answer and are thus less inclined to cheat or copy from others. This exercise gives me a clear view of what each student understood or did not understand about that day’s lesson. I do this three times a week on average, and each time I make a personal note in a printed attendance or gradebook log. At the beginning of class the next day, I hand these tickets back to the students with an additional guided question on them, encouraging them to try their attempt again. Shockingly, as this is not for a grade, students do re-attempt the prompted question, each time becoming stronger at that particular skill. I then record each subsequent attempt. Approximately three times a unit, I will use this data to differentiate my lesson, and give all-star students more challenging prompts, and the students that are not quite ready for the next step an average question. I usually sort this by Red Light (stop – below average), Yellow Light (proceed with caution), Green Light (Go! Bright Young Scholars), and for the high flyers, the Buzz Lightyear (to infinity and beyond!). My goal is to see my “scoresheet” progress from Red or Yellow lights to Green, with the occasional Buzz.

Classroom Activities

Prior to First Day of Instruction

Students will read *Slaughterhouse-Five* over the course one month. Upon the initial task, I will give the students a list of questions to guide their reading. I will check their progress (Are significant passages or page numbers written out to help them later respond to these tough questions?) at the end of every week see the timeline for chunking the novel below.

Timeline for Chunking the Novel (This is meant to guide students with pacing and accountability)

Week One: Chapters 1-3

Week Two: Chapters 4-5

Week Three: Chapters 6-8

Week Four: Chapters 9-10

Guided Questions for Reading

1. In his essay “Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric,” James Phelan elucidates the progression of a narrative as it is “governed by the implied author’s purposes in constructing the narrative one way rather than another.”^{vii} With Phelan’s comment in mind, how does Vonnegut’s dismissal of chronology add to your understanding of the overall meaning of the text?
2. Can literature teach readers to become moral thinkers? How does Billy Pilgrim communicate Vonnegut’s moral dilemmas?
3. Vonnegut’s style and content cannot be divorced from one another. How is Vonnegut’s style influenced and connected to his content? In what ways is this a novel that doesn’t make sense about something that doesn’t make sense?
4. In what ways is literature important in this novel? What is Vonnegut critiquing here? Take a look at Vonnegut’s use of allusion and science-fiction.
5. Billy comes unstuck in time in 1944 and then is abducted by aliens in 1967. What does the time travel do for Billy that the abduction does not?
6. The novel begins and ends with Kurt Vonnegut as a character who is also a writer with similar experiences to his author in WWII. Why does this character insert himself into his novel in chapters 2-9, *The Children’s Crusade*? Consider Phelan’s question of communicating authorial design.
7. What does the first chapter add to the novel? How?
8. How does Vonnegut use humor to highlight serious modern issues?
9. What is the scope of a revolution in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?
10. Joseph Stalin once said “the death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.” What does Vonnegut suggest war does to the humanity in the individual?
11. How do beliefs satisfy questions we have about our world? How does Vonnegut illustrate the effect of blind acceptance?
12. Why so many titles, Vonnegut? Consider the full title: *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children’s Crusade a Duty Dance with Death*.
13. How does Vonnegut employ contrast in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?

Instructional Days

Day One: Introduction to Ethics and Rhetoric

Preparing for the Activity: To begin “Stop Making Sense” I will introduce the class to important ethical dilemmas that are similar to those posed in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Read and be ready to discuss *Are we Morally Obligated to end the World?*^{viii} With large paper and markers, set up the classroom for Four Corners and label each corner with Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

Activity One: Read *Are we Morally Obligated to end the World?* out loud to the class, allowing time for students to react and respond to Stangroom’s question at the end of the selection.

- Why do you feel a connection to your particular side? (Asking for students’ affective responses opens up conversation that points back to the text.)
- Pay special attention to Goldtooth’s argument that “nonexistence is preferable to existence if one wants to minimize suffering.”^{ix}
- Consider options for countering Goldtooth’s claim that “there is a moral requirement to bring an end to human existence.”^x

Activity Two: Open class discussion of Stangroom’s response to the dilemma.^{xi}

- How does Stangroom design the short dilemma to engineer a conflicted response? (Some might point out the loaded language Stangroom uses to sway a reader in a particular direction.)

Activity Three: Read *Are you Morally Culpable or Just Unlucky?*^{xii} and *Was it Always Going to Happen?*^{xiii} and repeat the sequence of activities one and two.

Estimated Time for Activity: Forty-five minutes

Homework: Ask students to re-examine chapter 1 of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. What does the first chapter add to the novel? Responses should rely on using textual evidence and be no longer than one paragraph in total. *Remind students that they will need to turn in their guided questions next class.*

Day Two: First look at *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Guided Questions are due

Preparing for the Activity: Look through chapter one for passages that highlight Vonnegut’s style: juxtaposition, irony, parallelism, and allusion. Photo copy each significant passage and blow it up so that it fits a standard sheet of paper. Arrange the desks in pairs for a Silent Seminar. Tape each passage to the center of a large piece of butcher paper. This should cover about two desks.

Suggested Passages: The dirty limerick^{xiv}, the cyclical story of Yon Yonson^{xv}, the allusion to Theodore Roethke’s *The Waking*^{xvi}, the Biblical allusion to Lot’s wife^{xvii},

Gerhard Muller's Christmas card^{xviii}, the veteran's elevator death^{xix}, and the repetition of "so it goes."

Model Explication: Select one of the suggested passages above to model on the white board. Use a document camera to place the image of the passage on the board. Consider these close reading questions found online (https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/reading_lit.html)

Activity One: Place the butcher paper on each paired desk and ask the students to explicate the passage in front of them. See directions for silent seminar in the Strategies section of this paper.

Activity Two: Allow about five minutes to pass and then tell partners to rotate to another passage. Here, they will add to the first pair's explication or comment on the explication of the first pair. Rotate until all seven passages have been completed. When students have completed their final rotation, assign the exit ticket.

Exit Ticket: How is chapter one used as a means to communicate Vonnegut's design throughout the novel? Write about a specific passage that stood out to you during the silent seminar. Why did this stand out?

Estimated Time for Activity: Sixty-five minutes

Homework: Ask students to examine the structure of the novel. How is this different or similar to any book that you have read? Choose one of the following questions for which to respond:

- In his essay "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," James Phelan elucidates the progression of a narrative as it is "governed by the implied author's purposes in constructing the narrative one way rather than another."^{xx} With Phelan's comment in mind, how does Vonnegut's dismissal of chronology add to your understanding of the overall meaning of the text?
- Billy comes unstuck in time in 1944 and then is abducted by aliens in 1967. What does the time travel do for Billy that the abduction does not?

Day Three: Look at how Vonnegut uses the allusion to Theodore Roethke's *The Waking* and Billy's time-travel to communicate authorial design

Preparing for the Activity: Explicate Roethke's poem *The Waking*, the passage from chapter one of *Slaughterhouse-Five* that alludes to it^{xxi}, and the passage where Billy first comes "unstuck in time."^{xxii}

Activity One: Have students examine the allusion within chapter one. Ask affective questions. Most likely students will admit to being totally confused. Examine the poem

and bring the students to a concrete reason as to why they are so confused. Point out that the poem is built on paradoxes.

Activity Two: Re-examine the passage from chapter one.

- How does this allusion add to the overall meaning of the passage?
- How does the allusion add to the overall meaning on the novel?

Activity Three: Go back to the guided questions that the students handed in on Day Two.

- Consider this passage in relation to question nine: What is the scope of a revolution in *Slaughterhouse-Five*?
- What effect does repetition and circular motion have on the reader?
- Is this gimmicky or worth the payoff?

Activity Four: Have the class examine Billy Pilgrim's movement throughout the text with a specific look at the first moment he comes "unstuck in time." Have students explicate the passage.

- What seem to be the causes of Billy's time travel?

Estimated Time: Ninety minutes

Exit Ticket: Examine *The Two Thousand Yard Stare*.^{xxiii} How does this image relate to Vonnegut's design? Think about our discussion today.

Homework: Think back to our class discussion on ethics and consider the following:

- Can literature teach readers to become moral thinkers?
- How does Billy Pilgrim communicate Vonnegut's moral dilemmas?

Student responses should be no more than two paragraphs in length.

Day Four: Focus on Billy Pilgrim

Preparing for the Activity: Copy the Indirect Characterization graphic organizer found online

(<http://readwritegreen.pbworks.com/f/STEAL%20Characterization%20Graphic%20Organizer.pdf>)

Activity One: Examine Vonnegut's protagonist, Billy Pilgrim.

- Consider the name Billy Pilgrim in the context of Day Three's discussion.

Activity Two: Pass out the graphic organizer to characterize Billy Pilgrim. This should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Encourage the class to read the text closely, looking for recurring patterns of Billy's as well as the diction Vonnegut uses to describe Billy.

Activity Three: Discuss the activity as a class.

- Bring the discussion back to the homework from the previous class: Can literature teach readers to become moral thinkers? How does Billy Pilgrim communicate Vonnegut's moral dilemmas?

Estimated Time: Sixty minutes

Homework: Students will select one of the following questions for which to respond:

- The novel begins and ends with Kurt Vonnegut as a character who is also a writer with similar experiences to his author in WWII. Why does this character insert himself into his novel in chapters 2-9, *The Children's Crusade*? Consider Phelan's question of communicating authorial design.
- Why so many titles, Vonnegut? Consider the full title: *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade a Duty Dance with Death*.

Students should refer back to the significant passages they wrote down for this guided question. At least two of those significant passages should be used to influence and direct their responses which should be no longer than two paragraphs in length.

Day Five: Kurt Vonnegut the writer of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut the character in *Slaughterhouse-Five* who is also a writer, and Kurt Vonnegut the character as a narrator and an examination of the title(s)

Preparing for the Activity: Select passages wherein Vonnegut the character inserts himself into his novel *The Children's Crusade*—the novel within *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Activity One: Begin this lesson with a short clip from *The Office (U.S.)* season four, episode nine, "Local Ad." The clip "Dwight's Second Second Life" can be found in a search on YouTube. This twenty-six second clip shows Dwight Schrute playing a game called "Second Life" for which he creates an avatar that is just like him, however this avatar can fly. In a later clip from the same episode, Dwight's avatar in the computer game creates his own version of the game that his avatar exists in and calls it "Second Second Life." Jim Halpert, Dwight's coworker suggests that Dwight distances himself from reality to cope with a bad breakup. This clip has no explicit content or vulgar language, and given its similarity to the way in which Kurt Vonnegut creates a character

like himself to act as a surrogate in his novel, the clip is a comical comparative demonstration.

- How does this clip suggest that Dwight is coping with trauma?
- In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut the character admits “how useless the Dresden part of [his] memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about.”^{xxiv} How does the narration suggest disassociation?

Activity Two: Have students examine the opening line of the novel: “All this happened, more or less.”^{xxv} The characteristic of the novel is that it is a work of fiction, however the reader is immediately confronted with a question of reliable narration. Have the students think about this on their own and respond in writing.

- How is this important in tracking the progression of the novel?
- What other passages are key in questioning the reliability of the narration?
- What does this suggest about the implied author’s purpose?

Activity Three: Have the students get into pairs and share their findings from Activity Two. Each set of partners should come up with a comprehensive list of passages they agree to be vital in assessing the questions above.

Activity Four: Still in pairs, ask the class refer back to their homework options from the previous day’s lesson and discuss the second question:

- Why so many titles, Vonnegut? Consider the full title: *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children’s Crusade a Duty Dance with Death*.
- How does the title relate to the overall meaning of the novel?
- What passages stand out? Why?
- Joseph Stalin once said “the death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.” What does Vonnegut suggest war does to the humanity in the individual? How is this reflected in the title? In Billy?

Estimated Time: Ninety minutes

Day Six and Seven: Comparative Literature

This lesson aims to compare explicit and implicit questioning in selections from Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and how each regard ethically sensitive content. In his essay “Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric,” James Phelan suggests that “author’s purposes shape their choices of language, technique, structure, and other textual elements and [that] these choices in turn are the sources of our readerly experiences.”^{xxvi} This being said, students who struggle to refer directly to the text can be guided by their subjective responses to the text.

Preparing for the Activity: Identify selections that highlight ethical story-telling (ethics of the told vs. ethics of the telling) in *Time's Arrow* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Suggested Selection from *Time's Arrow*:

“To prevent needless suffering, the dental work was usually completed while the patients were not yet alive. The *Kapos* would go at it, crudely but effectively, with knives or chisels or any tool that came to hand. Most of the gold we used, of course, came direct from the Reichsbank. But every German present, even the humblest, gave willingly of his own store—I more than any other officer save “Uncle Pepi” himself. I *knew* my gold had a sacred efficacy. All those years I amassed it, and polished it with my mind: for the Jew’s teeth.”^{xxvii}

Activity One: Have the class examine the passage suggested above from *Time's Arrow*. Illicit students’ affective reactions to the passage and then point them back to the text.

- Prompt students to seek out the author’s style that made them feel a certain way.
- What is the difference between the content of the report and the delivery?
- What does this reveal about the narrator?

Activity Two: Have the class examine the following passage from *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

“And he told me about the concentration camps, and about how the Germans had made soap and candles out of the fat of dead Jews and so on. All I could say was, ‘I know, I know, I *know*.’”^{xxviii}

- Vonnegut’s style and content cannot be divorced from one another. How is Vonnegut’s style influenced and connected to his content?
- In what ways is this a novel that doesn’t make sense about something that doesn’t make sense?
- How do these authors force readers to ask questions?

Activity Three: As a class, examine the following passage from *Time's Arrow*.

“Each day, before the mirror, as I inspect Tod’s humanity—he shows no sign of noticing the improvement. It’s almost as if he has no point of comparison. I want to click my heels, I want to clench my fist: *Yes*. Why aren’t people happier about how great they’re feeling, relatively? Why don’t we hug each other all the time, saying, ‘How *about* this?’”^{xxix}

- What connections can you make to *Slaughterhouse-Five*?

- What do the authors suggest about happiness? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Activity Four: Hand out the final selected passage from *Time's Arrow*. The class will read this interactively, making annotations in the margins and/or taking two-sided notes. This last passage follows the "Soul's" misreporting and misreading of events in the women's crisis center.^{xxx}

- What is the relationship between cause and effect and how is this reversal affecting the "Soul's" ability to read and regard his situation?
- What passages from *Slaughterhouse-Five* compare? Why?
- What do you suggest the implied purposes of the authors are? What stylistic choices made by each author brought you to your conclusion?

Activity Five: Have the class evaluate the various ideologies presented in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Among them are: fatalism/determinism, materialism, sadism, patriotism, and pacifism.

- How do beliefs satisfy questions we have about our world?
- What characters resemble each ideology?
- How does Vonnegut illustrate the effect of blind acceptance?

Estimated Time: Two fifty-minute sessions

Homework: Ask the class to examine how Vonnegut employs contrast in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Students should write down their responses, citing at least two examples from the text. Responses should be no longer than two paragraphs.

Day Eight: Mimicking Style

Preparing for the Activity: Examine juxtaposition in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, noting Montana and Billy's last discussion in chapter 9. Here, Vonnegut juxtaposes pornography—Montana's *blue movie*—and war—"mak[ing] a blue movie with a firing squad."^{xxxi} Consider the passages from Amis on Days Six and Seven as well.

Activity One: Ask the class to think of a traumatic event in their life that they wish to reverse. Using this event, students will write a narrative in the style of Amis's character, "Soul." The narrator should naively misreport, misread, and misregard events. This should match the style of Vonnegut and Amis' backwards storytelling.

Activity Two: Have students evaluate their narrative.

- What challenges did this assignment present for you?

- What is your best line? Why?
- What did your narrator misreport, misread, and misregard?
- Having the attempted the style of Vonnegut and Amis, does this change how you value their work? Why?

Estimated Time: Ninety minutes

Day Nine: Themes and Motifs in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Preparing for the Activity: Revisit the passages from chapter one in conjunction with selections from entire novel. Place and tape down the passages from chapter one in the center of the butcher paper to prepare for Interactive Reading.

Activity One: Students revisit the passages from Day Two and explicate. They should note the style and structure of each passage and how they are influenced by Vonnegut's substance.

- Is the passage repetitive? How often Vonnegut reference this idea throughout the novel?
- What passages stand out in connection with the selected passages from chapter one? Why?
- How is Vonnegut's substance influencing his design?

Activity Two: Students should rotate the passages until all seven from Day Two have been revisited. Questions from Activity One should be considered here as well.

Estimated Time: 65 minutes

Day Ten and Eleven: Juxtaposition Project

Juxtaposition Project: After our multiple discussions of how Vonnegut and Amis employ contrast to highlight moral dilemmas, I will ask the class to produce a contrast of their own. I will give each student an image to examine and they will have to find and produce that picture's contrast. For example, a picture of an unemployment line and a picture of a shopping mall the eve of Black Friday. Once they have the two photos, they will examine each for style, structure, and substance.

Preparing for the Activity: Sign up for time in a computer lab or your school's Media Center to allow the students an avenue for finding contrasting photos. Select photographs for the juxtaposition project, using *Picturing Texts*.

Activity One: Assign a photograph to each student. These do not need to be different for each student; a circulation of ten different photographs would be fine.

- Examine your image as you would a piece of rhetoric. What is the author of the image forcing us to think?
- How is he or she accomplishing this?
- What might the photograph's contrast be?

Activity Two: Allow the students to begin researching their contrast. Each student should find an image to evaluate in a side-by-side comparison.

- What can we learn from examining the images comparatively?

Activity Three: Once the students have chosen their contrasting image, they act as the author, juxtaposing the images to create a new meaning.

- Examine your images as you would a piece of rhetoric. What is the new meaning?
- How do you intend to accomplish this new meaning?

Activity Four: Write a one page—single-spaced explication of your concept.

- How has the style of the first image been influenced by its content? To what specific part of the image are you referring?
- How has the style of the second image been influenced by its content? To what specific part of the image are you referring?
- How has the content of the photographs influenced your stylistic choices (your choice of contrast)?
- What response does the juxtaposition evoke? Why?

Appendix 1: Implementing Common Core Standards

RL.11-12.5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

“Stop Making Sense” focuses on the importance how an author structures his or her novel and its contribution to the meaning of the text. Students will draw on the way Vonnegut frames the narrative, creates patterns for the characters and reader, and dismisses chronology in order to determine meaning.

RL.11-12.6. Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

Students will read Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as well as selected passages from Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, both of which rely on readers accurately addressing the point of view. Vonnegut employs black humor and satire which students will be able to effectively evaluate by the end of this unit. Amis employs an unreliable narrator to report sensitive ethical issues which students will be able to evaluate through adherence to this standard.

RI.11-12.3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

This unit aims for students to be able to close read informational texts as well a fiction. By the end of this unit students will be able to explain ethical dilemmas and other entry level philosophical concepts which they have read from informational texts.

RI.11-12.6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

Students will read informational texts and evaluate the rhetorical approach in the text as a part of close reading. The class will engage in discussion of the effectiveness of the style in relation to its content.

Materials for Classroom Use

Reading Material

The reading materials for this unit are Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, selections from Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, and selections from Jeremy Stangroom's *Would You Eat Your Cat?*

Templates and Graphic Organizers

Students will need copies of the Indirect Characterization Sheet to examine the character of Billy Pilgrim.

Classroom Materials

The teacher will need access to a projector, document camera, pens, pencils, markers, and butcher paper.

Bibliography for Teachers and Students

Amis, Martin. *Time's Arrow, Or, The Nature of the Offense*. New York: Harmony Books, 1991.

This is a work of fiction that surrounds a naïve and unreliable narrator delivering a tale of a Nazi doctor during WWII. The work is a challenging read as it is entirely told backwards. It is in this way that Amis turns the extermination of a race into the creation of one. This is truly a gripping novel containing many ethical dilemmas.

Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe. *Picturing Texts*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

This is a helpful text for reading non-print texts as texts. This book contains iconic images and discusses strategies as well as lists questions to consider in the discussion of them.

Phelan, James. "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric: The Example of Time's Arrow." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2009): 217-28. Accessed August 11, 2014. <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

This article was instrumental in aiding my understanding of how to adapt a rhetorical approach for analyzing works of fiction. This text help me to further understand Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* as well.

Stangroom, Jeremy. *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell You about Yourself*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.

This text takes a clever and amusing approach to understanding ethical dilemmas. The book is set up with short dilemmas in the front and the philosophical responses to each in the back. The language is conversational and easily understood.

Talbot, Mary, Mason Sales, and Adair Margo. "Tom Lea Gallery." Tom Lea. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 10, 2014. <http://tomlea.com/gallery/wwii/>.

The Tom Lea Institute has a great virtual gallery of Tom Lea's work.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse-five, Or, the Children's Crusade: A Duty-dance with Death*. New York: Dell, 1969.

This novel is a challenging exploration of what war does to the individual. Among the challenging elements are the dismissal of chronology, science-fiction and fantasy, and sensitive ethical content.

Wheeler, L. Kip. "Close Reading of a Literary Passage." Close Reading of a Literary Passage. November 4, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2014. https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/reading_lit.html.

This website provides general questions to support a close reading of any fiction text. The questions are organized by first impression, vocabulary and diction, discerning patterns, point of view and characterization, and symbolism.

Notes

ⁱ James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

ⁱⁱ James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 219-220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

^{iv} James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 221, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

^v James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 223, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

^{vi} James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 223, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

^{vii} James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.

^{viii} Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 18-19

^{ix} Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 19

^x Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 19

^{xi} Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 77-79

^{xii} Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 40-41

^{xiii} Jeremy Stangroom, *Would You Eat Your Cat?: Key Ethical Conundrums and What They Tell you about Yourself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), 48-49

^{xiv} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 2-3

^{xv} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 3

^{xvi} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 20

^{xvii} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 21-22

^{xviii} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 2

^{xix} Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 9

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- xx James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>.
- xxi Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 20
- xxii Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 43-44
- xxiii Mary Talbot, Mason Sales, and Adair Margo, "Tom Lea Gallery," *Tom Lea Institute*, January 1, 2014, <http://tomlea.com/gallery/wwii/>.
- xxiv Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 2
- xxv Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 1
- xxvi James Phelan, "Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 220, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://muse.hju.edu/journals/ped/summary/v010/10.1.phelan.html>
- xxvii Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 121
- xxviii Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 10
- xxix Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 43
- xxx Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 31
- xxxi Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 207