



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

Kurt Vonnegut's
**Who am I
this Time?**
(& other conundrums of love)
by Aaron Posner

January 28 – February 23, 2014, on the IRT's OneAmerica Stage

STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright

Indiana Repertory Theatre
140 West Washington Street • Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
Janet Allen, Executive Artistic Director Suzanne Sweeney, Managing Director

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Kurt Vonnegut's *Who Am I This Time?* (and Other Conundrums of Love)

by Aaron Posner

Some of Vonnegut's most endearing characters take us on a journey searching for love and identity. These stories are taken from his first collection, *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

Estimated length: 2 hours

Recommended for students in grades 8-12

This play will help meet [Common Core Standards / Indiana Standards](#) applications for English/Language Arts and Theatre Arts.

Themes & Issues:

Vonnegut short stories

Search for identity

Romance

Student Matinees: February 5, 7, 11, & 19 at 10:00 am

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Introduction to the Play

Who Am I This Time? (and Other Conundrums of Love) by Aaron Posner is a stage adaptation of three short stories by Kurt Vonnegut.

“Long Walk to Forever” was originally published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1960. It focuses on a young soldier who goes AWOL to propose to a longtime friend who is about to marry another man. Like many of Vonnegut’s works, this story has elements of autobiography. Although it tells the story of a proposal, it is perhaps not as sweet as might be expected. Most of the “Long Walk” of the title is occupied by an extended argument. In fact, Vonnegut’s original title for the story (changed by the magazine’s editor) was “Hell to Get Along With.”

“Who Am I This Time?” was originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1961. It centers on an extremely shy hardware store clerk who comes to life only when he is on stage in his community theatre, and a seemingly friendly but distant phone company representative who falls in love with his onstage persona. The play looks at the masks we present to the world and the barriers, both personal and technological, that separate us.

“Go Back to Your Precious Wife and Son” was originally published in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1962. It features a famous writer who has left his family for a Hollywood movie star. This couple’s passionate yet rocky relationship is contrasted with the perhaps less exciting but more stable marriage of a small-town couple. When we long for greener pastures, we may be surprised by the results.

All three stories may be found in Vonnegut’s 1968 short story collection, *Welcome to the Monkey House*. Unlike Vonnegut’s more experimental works, these three stories use traditional narrative styles; yet, like most of Vonnegut’s work, the ultimate focus is on human relationships. These early stories develop some of Vonnegut’s favorite career themes, including the disintegration of the family, the mechanization of society, and the fight against loneliness. All three stories highlight questions of identity, a theme further emphasized by the play’s use of a small company of actors who not only play different characters in each story, but will also form an onstage band.



Playwright Aaron Posner

Aaron Posner is a playwright, director, teacher, and consultant. He has been a co-founder, artistic director, and resident director of Philadelphia’s Arden Theatre, where he has directed more than 40 productions. He directs nationally at the Folger Theatre, Seattle Rep, Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, Arizona Theatre Company, and many others. His adaptations of Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen* and *My Name Is Asher Lev* have been performed throughout the country. He graduated from Northwestern University.

Kurt Vonnegut, Home-Town Boy

by Janet Allen, Executive Artistic Director

Kurt Vonnegut makes me proud to be a Hoosier. I've been reading him since I was 16 (when I was still merely a Land of Lincolner). I was visiting my older sister at the University of Illinois (where she lived in an honest-to-goodness co-ed dorm!), and someone handed me a copy of Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. A book they were reading in college—it was like literary contraband! So I long associated Vonnegut with the intellectual freedoms and social experimentation of college in the 1970s. Only later, when I myself became a transplanted Hoosier, did I learn that Vonnegut was a native Hoosier, and that was a lovely discovery. It made so many other things about his writing deeper.

We've been looking for an opportunity to put some Vonnegut onstage for a long time. His piquant drawing of character, his wry sense of humor, his affinity for dialogue, the warmth of his satire, the way in which his Indiana upbringing infuses his work with a sense of well-being and common sense—all these make his writing delightful for any audience, but a particular gift for Hoosiers. Now, thankfully, here we are, staging three of his early short stories, in a lovely, easy-going adaptation by Aaron Posner. These stories were written in the early sixties and originally published in the *Ladies Home Journal* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1968, they were included in a collection titled *Welcome to the Monkey House*, which was, for many decades, my (and surely many in my generation's) favorite collection of short stories.

These three early love stories may strike Vonnegut enthusiasts as rather on the tame side of Vonnegut, and that is true. "Long Walk to Forever" (which Vonnegut claimed he wanted to title "Hell to Get Along With") is at least in part autobiographical. "Who Am I This Time?" springboards from Vonnegut's fascination with the theatre—you might recall he wrote some plays. "Go Back to Your Precious Wife and Son" debunks the glamor of fame and wistfully looks at the cost of a broken marriage and its impact on children, something Vonnegut also knew about first hand. Vonnegut's prodigious storytelling abilities and his mastery for weaving human story and character in winsome, humor-filled detail create a veritable smorgasbord for actors!

In hopes of inspiring a Vonnegut reading renaissance, I'd like to recommend my favorite recent collections: *God Bless You, Doctor Kevorkian* (1999), featuring radio shows Vonnegut wrote for NPR, make me laugh so hard, it's dangerous. *A Man without a Country* (2005) shares Vonnegut's thoughts on the condition of the American soul, and the posthumously published *If This Isn't Nice, What Is? Advice for the Young* (2013) focuses on speeches Vonnegut gave at various graduations and awards ceremonies. These books, as with all of his collections, inspire raucous laughter; they are easy to dip into and hard to put down. You should run out and buy them at the Vonnegut Memorial Library or Indy Reads, two partners in our current enterprise. Thanks to them both!

Vonnegut ranks up there with Twain, so in my humble estimation we Hoosiers should claim him more vocally and joyously. Not that he always praised the state of his birth—he didn't. Nor did he even consider it home, after all the years of his adult life spent on the East Coast. But he never lost his insight into our place, and he wrote about it, over and over, because, as he knew, where one comes from matters. Here are a couple glimpses into his views on his home town:

Indianapolis ... was laid out on a featureless land as flat as a pool table (Eightball, anybody?), according to a plan by the French-born architect Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who had designed yet another arbitrarily chosen capital, Washington, D.C.... It is an infinitely expandable chessboard of identical squares, each block one-tenth of a mile long, with all streets running exactly east and west or north and south and with a circle in the middle (shades of Euclidean idealism of the French Revolution, whose child I sometimes think I am)....

I was lucky to be born there.... That city gave me a free primary and secondary education richer and more humane than anything I would get from any of the five universities I attended (Cornell, Butler, Carnegie Tech, Tennessee, and Chicago). It had a widespread system of free libraries whose attendants seemed to my young mind to be angels of fun with information. There were cheap movie houses and jazz joints everywhere. There was a fine symphony orchestra.... In Indianapolis back then, it was only the really dumb rich kids who got sent away to prep school.

—*from Fates Worse Than Death (1991)*

If I had it to do all over, I would choose to grow up again at 44th Street and North Illinois in Indianapolis, Indiana. I would be born again in one of the city's hospitals, again be a product of its public schools....

It was all here for me, just as it has all been here for you: the best and the worst of civilization, for right here you can find music, finance, government, architecture, painting, and sculpture, history, medicine, athletics, and books, books, books, and science. And role models and teachers. People so smart you can't believe it, and people so dumb you can't believe it. People so nice you can't believe it, and people so mean you can't believe it.... What I'm saying is that this is very fertile soil here. I'm not talking about corn and pigs. I'm talking about growing important souls and intellects.

The people I choose to celebrate today, though, aren't those Middle Westerners who became world famous.... The people I admire the heck out of today are those who built cities like this, with universities like this one, with symphony halls like that one, with art museums like the one over there somewhere, with libraries in every neighborhood. And the churches and hospitals. And the factories and stores. Utopia....

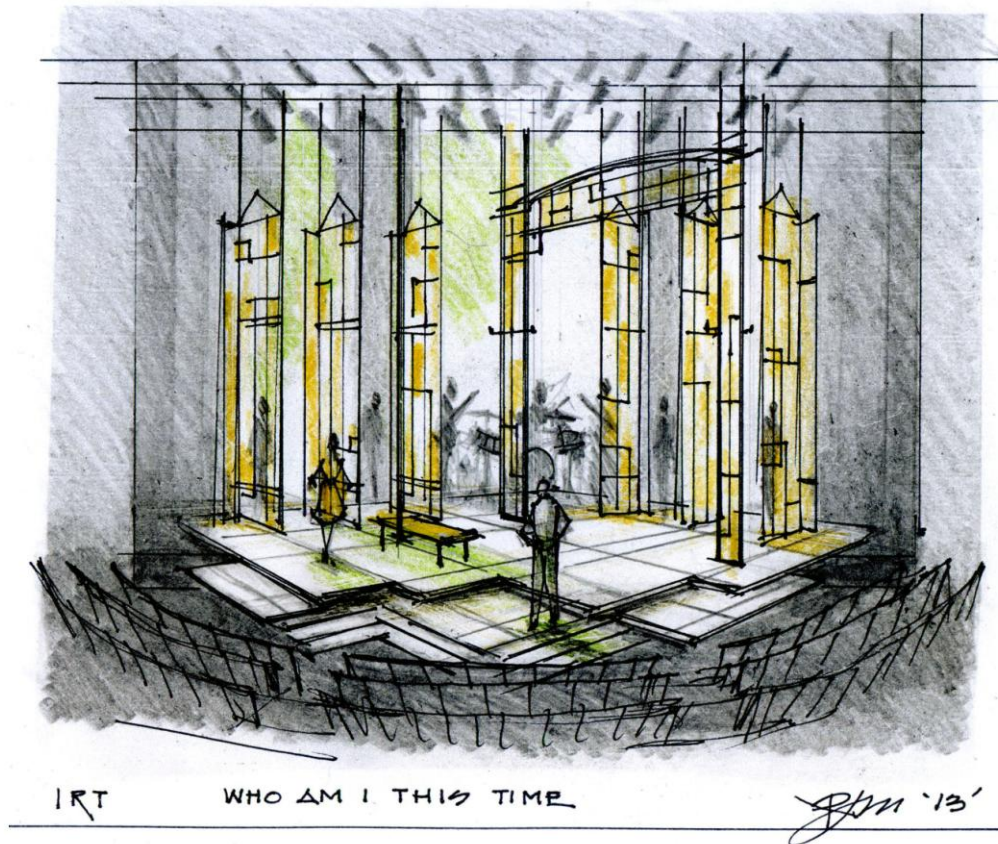
Some of you won't stay home. But please don't forget where you came from. I never did.



—*from a speech
at Butler University, reprinted in
If This Isn't Nice, What Is?
Advice for the Young (2013)*

*Kurt Vonnegut attended
Shortridge High School
in Indianapolis.*

Welcome to North Crawford



Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Russell Metheny.

Russell Metheny Scenic Designer

Who Am I This Time? lives in a witty, loving, *Prairie Home Companion*–like world where mom-and-pop stores were having their last hurrah, communities had clubs and PTAs, everyone knew everyone, and there was a community theatre that allowed everyone the opportunity to be a star. Detroit cars were getting bigger, better, faster, shinier. Hollywood movies were getting wider, wider, wider. New improved appliances and epic home TV-stereo systems signaled an unstoppable reinvention of modern living.

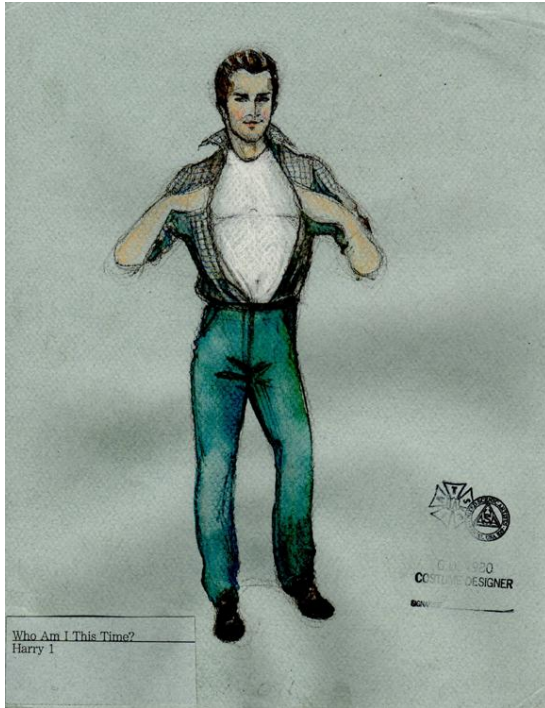
The set for this production is inspired by all of that, plus the Mondrian craze in architecture and graphics. Vonnegut's wiry, witty, graphic line art also plays a part. The frame of the set marries the world of a community theatre as seen from the wings with the town itself. Rolling carts represent shops and homes, Ma Bell and the local plumber. A tree from the nursery and a screen door suggest romance. The audience sees the community theatre rehearsal and performance from backstage. These iconic elements enable a cinematic momentum for overlapping scenes, simultaneous scenes, and exclamation points.

It is the stories' characters and the actors' performances that are the center of this world, intimately connecting with the audience. And so the set itself steps down and spills into the audience, inviting everyone into this time and place where we can all relive the last hurrah of a truly American Main Street life that would soon disappear into malls and multiplexes, suburban sprawl and empty dreams.

Michael Lincoln Lighting Designer

As I began to conceive the lighting for *Who Am I This Time?*, it occurred to me that designers ask similar questions when we take on the role of designer for a particular play. What does this play need in the lighting? What kind of designer am I this time? These are heart-warming American stories, presented in a frankly theatrical environment, and they call for some lighting magic. Mix equal measures of backstage comedy, warmth, romance, and magic, and we have a perfect recipe for a lovely evening in the theater.

Renderings by costume designer Rachel Anne Healy:



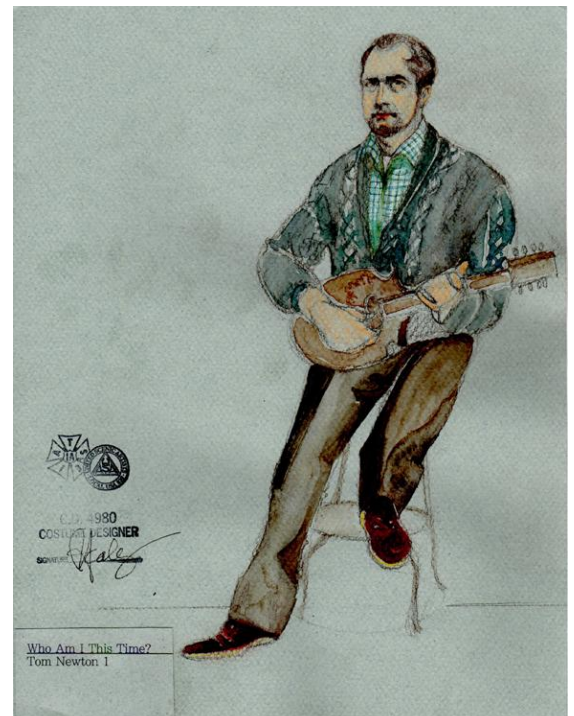
*Harry Nash
preparing for his
performance as
Stanley Kowalski
in "Who Am I
This Time?"*

*Catharine in
"Long Walk to
Forever"*



*Hollywood star
Gloria Hilton in
"Go Back to Your
Precious Wife
and Son"*

*Tom Newton,
our narrator*

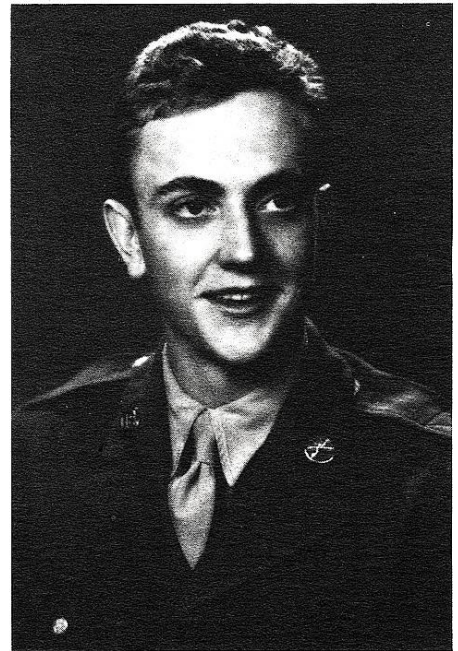


Author Kurt Vonnegut: “So It Goes”

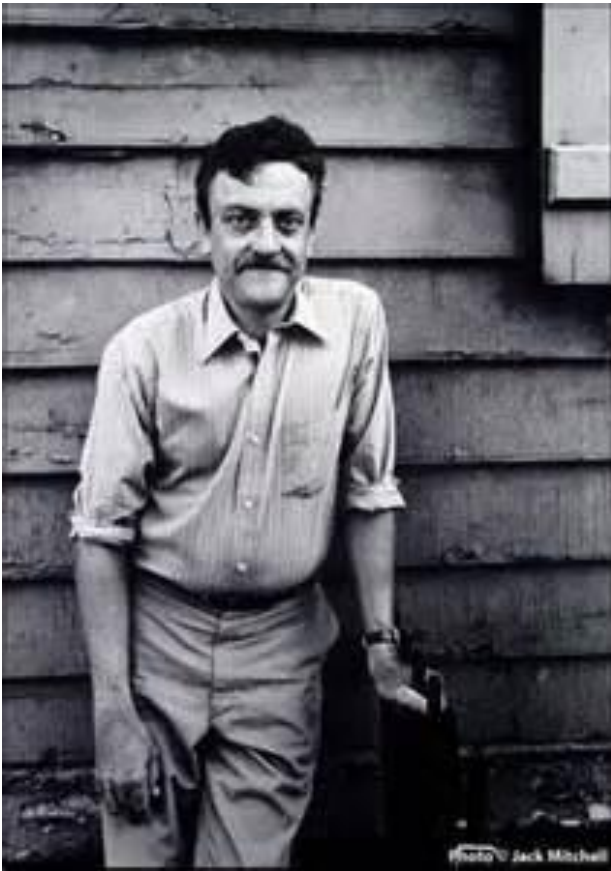
In his wryly satiric novels, stories, and essays, Kurt Vonnegut’s dark comic voice speaks with an urgent and compelling moral vision. His work often uses elements of fantasy and science fiction to comment on the painful realities of life and the need for humanity in a world overrun by machines. Some readers find his peculiar blend of science fiction with autobiography, philosophy, and jokes to be incoherent. But others feel that Vonnegut invigorated the science-fiction form with humor and moral relevance, elevating it to serious literature. In anti-realistic novels such as *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Cat’s Cradle*, and *Breakfast of Champions*, he captured the climate of the times. Like Mark Twain, Vonnegut used humor to tackle the basic questions of human existence: Why are we in this world? Is there a god?

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born in Indianapolis in 1922. His grandfather, Bernard Vonnegut Sr., was an architect who designed such local landmarks as the Athenaeum, the Block’s and Ayres buildings downtown, and the Herron School of Art (now Herron High School). His father, Kurt Sr., was also an architect. The family lost most of its wealth in the Great Depression, and the household was never the same. Kurt was withdrawn from the Orchard School and entered public school. His father fell into a severe depression, and his mother, Edith, eventually committed suicide on Mother’s Day 1944. Achieving and then losing the American Dream would become a theme in Vonnegut’s work.

Kurt attended Shortridge High School and wrote for his school paper, the *Echo*. At Cornell University he studied bio-chemistry and was an editor on the *Cornell Daily Sun*. World War II intervened, however, and he enlisted in the Army before he graduated. His unit was devastated in the Battle of the Bulge, and he was captured by the Germans, surviving the firebombing of Dresden imprisoned in an underground slaughterhouse. Some 25,000 civilians were killed in the attack. For weeks afterwards, the Germans forced the prisoners to find and gather the dead bodies and pile them up for burning. Vonnegut later said, “There were too many corpses to bury. So instead the Germans sent in troops with flamethrowers. All these civilians’ remains were burned to ashes.” This horrific experience affected him significantly.



After the war Vonnegut married his high school sweetheart, Jane Marie Cox, and studied anthropology at the University of Chicago. The couple had three children and also adopted three orphaned nephews. Vonnegut worked a variety of jobs, including police reporter, public relations agent, sportswriter, special needs teacher, advertising copywriter, and car dealer.



In 1950 he began writing short stories for popular, traditional magazines such as *Collier's*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Vonnegut supplied them with reasonably conventional, somewhat traditional stories, as well as science fiction, later remarking that he wrote these stories to support his life as a starving novelist. But a closer look reveals that they touch on many of the same themes as his novels. Probably the most well known is "Harrison Bergeron," in which a brutally repressive government stifles excellence to enforce strict egalitarianism.

Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (published in 1952), satirizes corporate life, presenting a dystopian world in which human workers have been largely replaced by machines. *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) is a whimsical science fiction epic in which the entire history of humanity turns out to be an accident triggered by an alien planet's search for a spare part for a spaceship. Vonnegut often used fantasy

settings as a metaphor for the absurdity and surrealism of modern society, but his central focus was always on the hapless human beings who struggle in these bizarre worlds.

In *Cat's Cradle* (1963), a scientist develops a fictional substance, Ice-Nine, that solidifies non-frozen water to facilitate military maneuvers in swampy ground. The misuse of this technology leads to mass deaths. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Vonnegut warned of the enormous destructive potential of technology that is developed without regard for humanity.

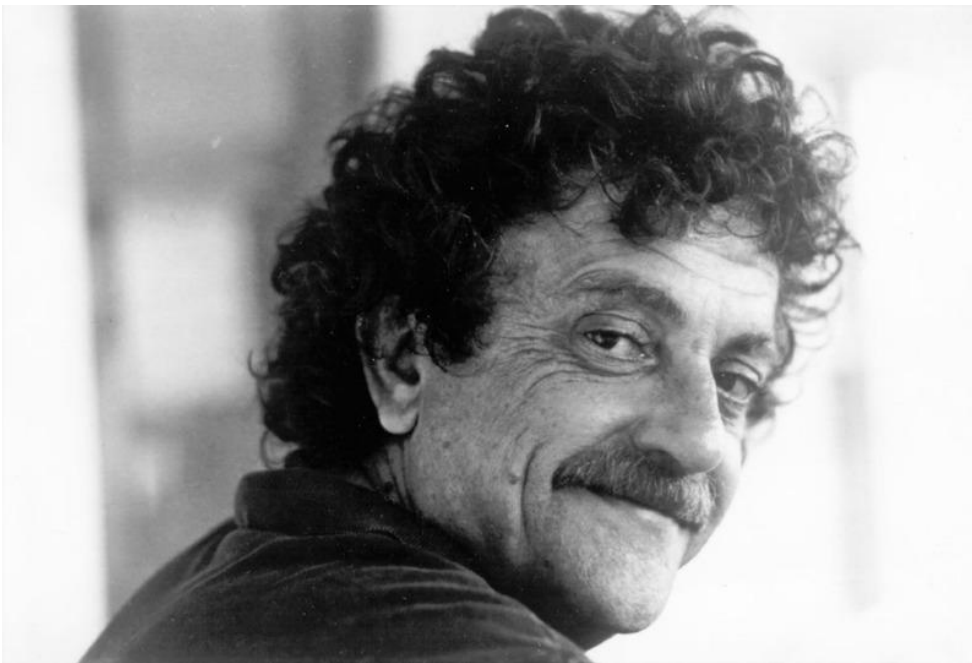
Vonnegut felt that simple kindness was the only way to deal with the madness and apparent meaninglessness of existence. In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), he wrote: "Hello, babies. Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies ... 'you've got to be kind.'" *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* also marked the first appearance of Kilgore Trout, Vonnegut's fictional alter ego, a character featured in several novels.

Slaughterhouse-Five was inspired by Vonnegut's experience in the firebombing of Dresden, which he used as a symbol for the cruelty and destructiveness of all war. The novel is filled with images of suffering and loss, as well as time travel and space aliens. Its central character randomly experiences events from his own past, present, and future, creating an absurdist, non-linear narrative.

Slaughterhouse-Five is the source of Vonnegut's signature phrase. He wrote: "Robert Kennedy, whose summer home is eight miles from the home I live in all year round, was shot two nights ago. He died last night. So it goes. Martin Luther King was shot a month ago. He died, too. So it goes. And every day my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam. So it goes."

Published in 1969, *Slaughterhouse-Five* seized the imagination of a country beset by racial, cultural, and social upheaval, at the height of Vietnam War protests. One critic said that the book "so perfectly caught America's transformative mood that its story and structure became best-selling metaphors for the new age." Today it is considered Vonnegut's masterpiece, and one of the most important novels of the 20th century.

Vonnegut turned to the stage with *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1970), a re-write of an earlier play. Inspired by the return of Odysseus to his wife, Penelope, the play skewers phony heroes and male swagger. It opened Off-Broadway to mixed reviews.



Around this time, Vonnegut became withdrawn and depressed and suffered from writer's block. With his children grown up and gone from home, his marriage was falling apart. Eventually he and Jane divorced, and he married photographer Jill Krementz, with whom he adopted a seventh child. The disintegration of families would become a major theme in Vonnegut's next two novels.

In *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), a car dealer becomes obsessed with the science fiction of Kilgore Trout, who has begun to believe that everyone around him is a robot. This commentary on writing, fame, and American social values has become one of Vonnegut's most popular novels. *Slapstick* (1976) focuses on powerful and creative but physically unattractive siblings who develop a plan to end loneliness through vast, extended families. In both books, Vonnegut bemoans the despair and isolation that result from the loss of traditional culture in the United States. In 1984, struggling with depression as both his parents had, Vonnegut tried to take his life with sleeping pills and alcohol.

A number of critics believe that in his later works Vonnegut repeated themes he had presented more compellingly in earlier works. In *Timequake* (1997), a wrinkle in the space-time continuum forces the world to relive the 1990s. Vonnegut himself described the book as “a stew” of plot summaries and autobiographical writings. Once again, Kilgore Trout is a character. Vonnegut said, “If I’d wasted my time creating characters, I would never have gotten around to calling attention to things that really matter.”

In the 1980s and '90s, as his novels began to be less well received, Vonnegut found more success with his essays. He became a powerful spokesman for the preservation of Constitutional freedoms, for nuclear arms control, and for environmental protection. As the new century dawned, Vonnegut continued his effort to be “a responsible elder in our society,” speaking against the militarization of the United States after the 2001 terrorist attacks. His last collection of essays, *A Man without a Country* (2005), expressed his belief that corporate greed, overpopulation, and war would win out over simple humanity: “We could have saved the world, but we were just too damned lazy.”

In 2007, at the age of 84, Kurt Vonnegut died after falling down a flight of stairs in his home and suffering massive head trauma. He was mourned the world over as one of the great American writers of the modern age.

Throughout his career, Vonnegut’s deep cynicism was tempered by his modern humanist beliefs. His deceptively simple storytelling required wild leaps of imagination. Although his works are often irreverent, playful, and humorous, he addressed the pressing social, philosophical, and literary concerns of the late 20th century. Like Andy Warhol, he blurred the lines between high and low culture. He offered a scathing critique of social injustice, war, and environmental destruction, while expressing love and compassion for the weak, the bewildered, and the lonely.

At the time of his death in 2007, Kurt Vonnegut had been scheduled to speak at Butler University in Indianapolis. In his stead, his son Mark delivered a speech that the author had written for the event, reportedly the last thing he wrote. It ended with these words: “I thank you for your attention, and I’m outta here.”

Throughout his life Vonnegut smoked unfiltered cigarettes, a habit he referred to as “a classy way to commit suicide.”



Vonnegut Bibliography

Novels

Player Piano (1952)

Utopia 14 (1954; republication of *Player Piano*)

The Sirens of Titan (1959)

Mother Night (1961)

Cat's Cradle (1963)

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, or Pearls Before Swine (1965)

Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death (1969)

Breakfast of Champions, or Goodbye Blue Monday (1973)

Slapstick, or Lonesome No More (1976)

Jailbird (1979)

Deadeye Dick (1982)

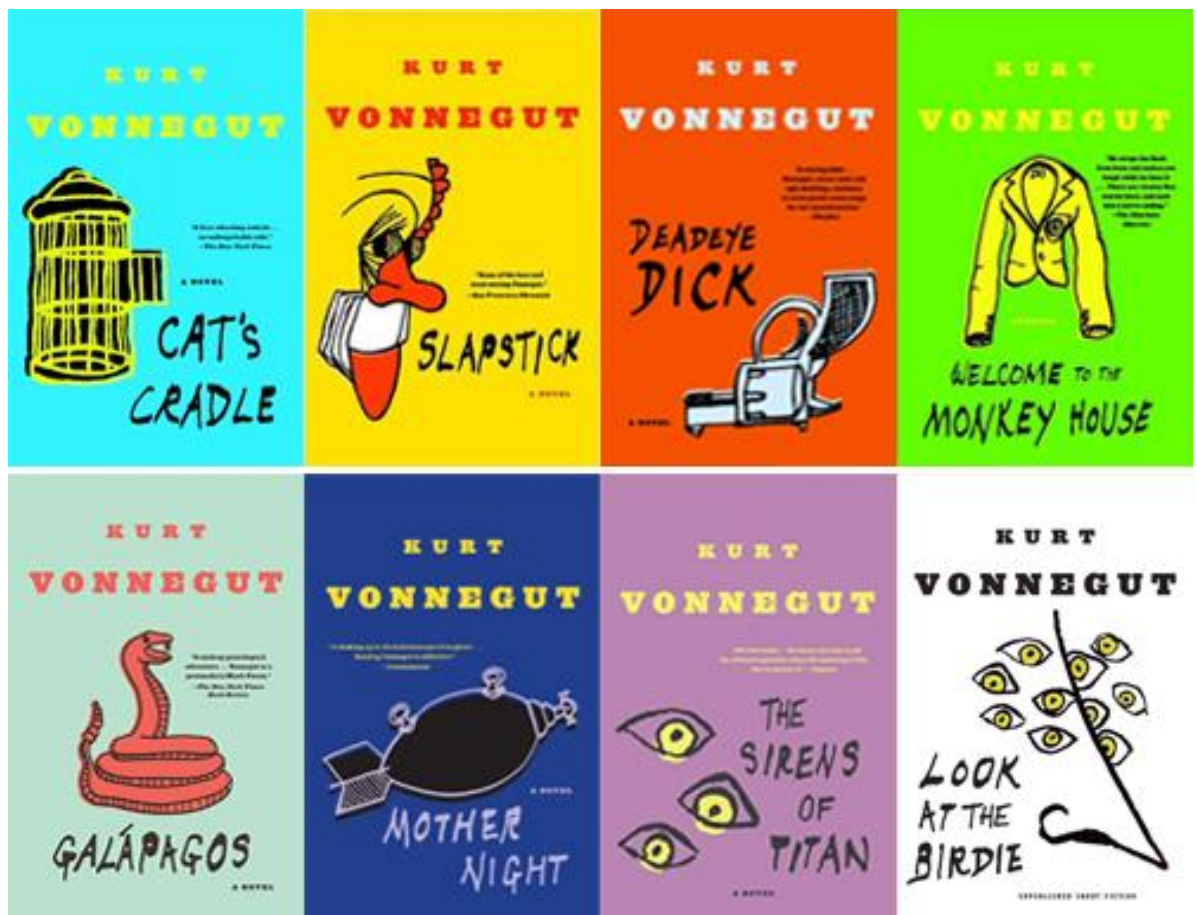
Galápagos: A Novel (1985)

Bluebeard (1987)

Hocus Pocus (1990)

Timequake (1997)

Recent paperback editions of Vonnegut's works have featured his own artwork on the covers.



Collections (Short Fiction, Essays, Etc.)

Canary in a Cathouse (1961)

Welcome to the Monkey House: A Collection of Short Works (1968)

Wampeters, Foma, and Granfalloon (1974)

Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage (1981)

Nothing Is Lost Save Honor: Two Essays (1984)

Fates Worse than Death : an Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s (1991)

Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction (1999)

God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian (1999)

A Man Without a Country: A Memoir of Life in George W. Bush's America (2005)

Armageddon in Retrospect (2008)

Look at the Birdie: Unpublished Short Fiction (2009)

While Mortals Sleep: Unpublished Short Fiction (2011)

Plays

Penelope (1960)

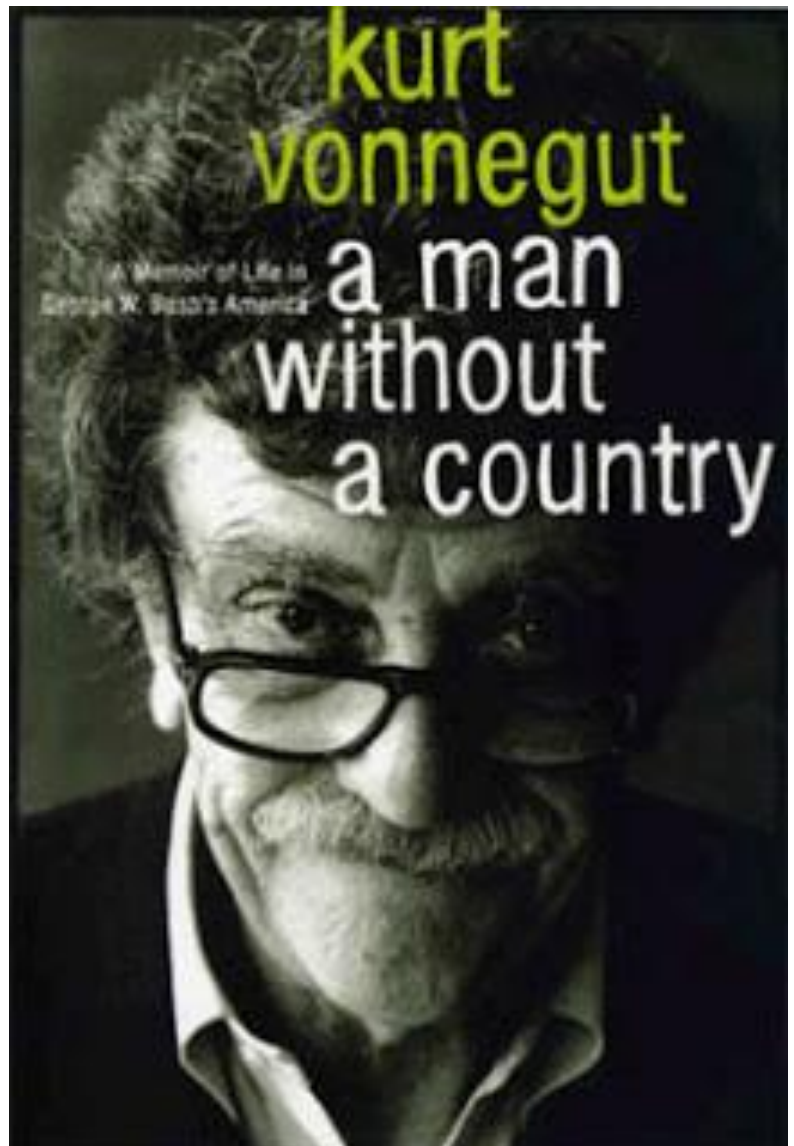
Fortitude (1968)

Happy Birthday, Wanda June
(1970; revision of *Penelope*)

Between Time and Timbuktu,
or Prometheus-5: A Space Fantasy
(1972)

Make Up Your Mind (1993)

Miss Temptation (1993)



The Quotable Vonnegut

“I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, ‘If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.’”

— *In These Times*

“Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven’s sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.”

— *A Man without a Country*

“Now, you can say your Daddy is right and the other little child’s Daddy is wrong, but the universe is an awfully big place. There is room enough for an awful lot of people to be right about things and still not agree.”

— *The Sirens of Titan*

“The arts put man at the center of the universe, whether he belongs there or not. Military science, on the other hand, treats man as garbage—and his children, and his cities, too. Military science is probably right about the contemptibility of man in the vastness of the universe. Still—I deny that contemptibility, and I beg you to deny it, through the creation or appreciation of art.”

— Bennington College Commencement Address, 1970

“There is no order in the world around us, we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead. It is hard to adapt to chaos, but it can be done. I am living proof of that: It can be done.”

— *Breakfast of Champions*

“New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become.”

— *Breakfast of Champions*

“Another flaw in the human character is that everybody wants to build and nobody wants to do maintenance.”

— *Hocus Pocus*

“We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be.”

— *Mother Night*

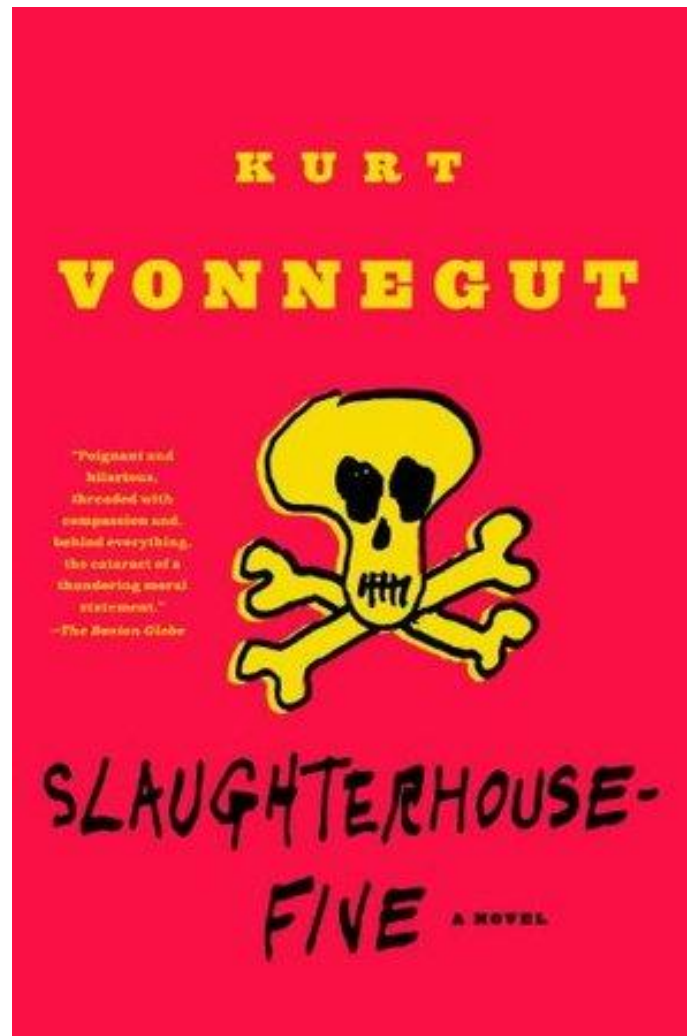
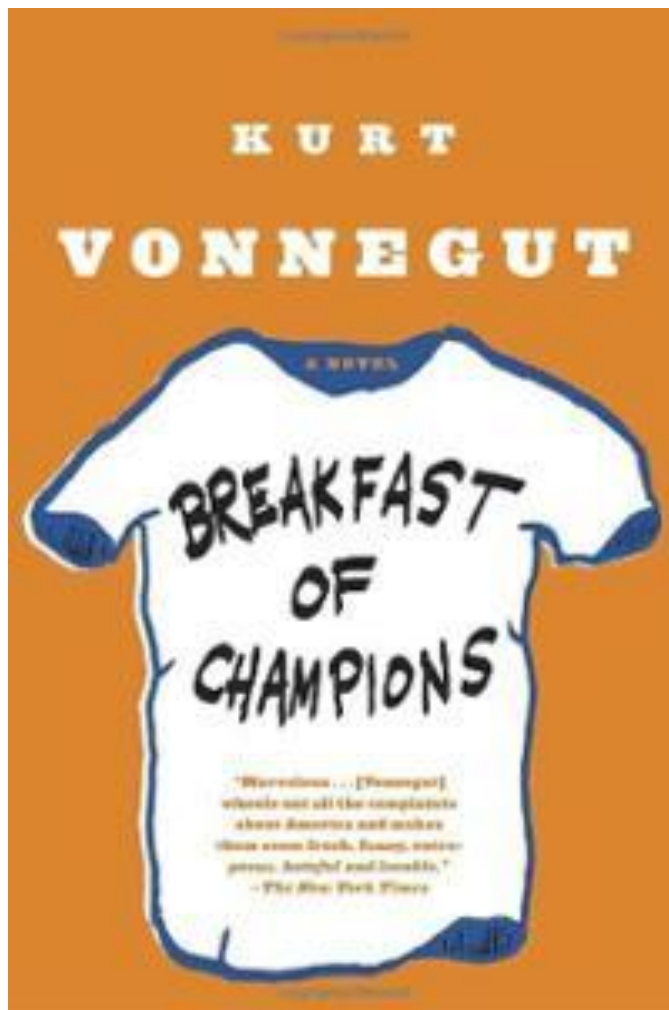
“There are plenty of good reasons for fighting, but no good reason ever to hate without reservation, to imagine that God Almighty Himself hates with you, too.”

— *Mother Night*

Vonnegut's Visual Art

Kurt Vonnegut's work as a graphic artist began with his illustrations for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, developed with *Breakfast of Champions*, and continued to appear in many of his novels and short story collections. Later in his career, he became more interested in artwork, particularly silk-screen prints, which he pursued in collaboration with artist Joe Petro III.

In 1980, Vonnegut exhibited his drawings in pen, pencil, and colored felt-tipped markers at the Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd. in New York. At the exhibition's opening, Vonnegut expressed his preference for using colored felt-tipped markers rather than oil paints or watercolor. "Oil is such a commitment," Vonnegut explained, whereas he



found watercolors "too bland, too weak." On the other hand, he said, "they make such extraordinary Magic Markers, such brilliant colors. It makes things very easy."

Vonnegut compared the creative process of drawing to that of writing. "If you make a mistake on a picture, it's satisfying to wad it up and toss it out. When you have to do that with a written page, it's a more depressing failure." He further noted that "In a picture there may be 10 or 12 significant details. On a printed page there are 2,500."

Recent paperback editions of Vonnegut's works have featured his own artwork on the covers.

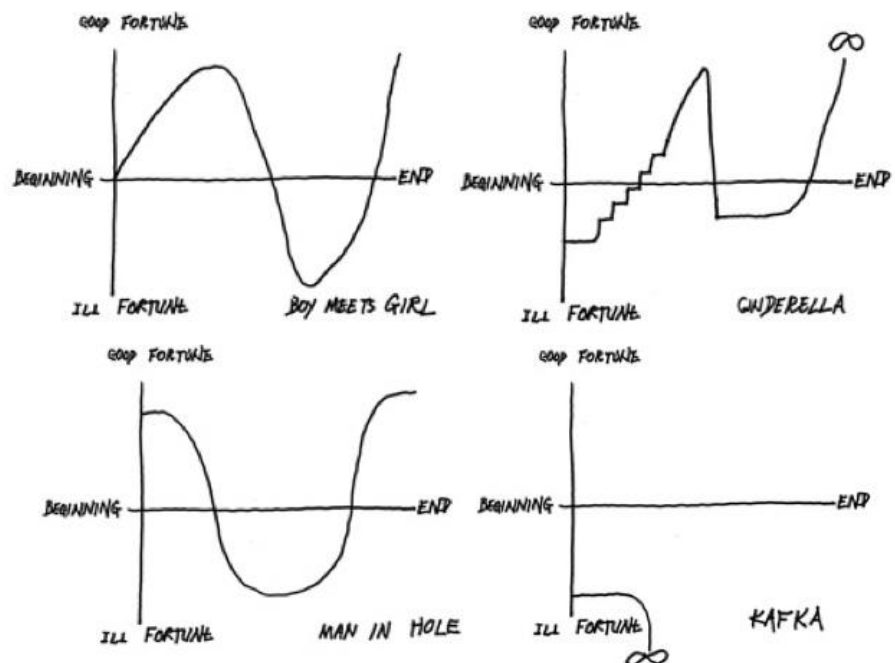
Kurt Vonnegut's 8 Rules of Writing Fiction

In his introduction to *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction* (1999), Kurt Vonnegut listed the following:

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things—reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them—in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

Vonnegut qualified his list, however, noting that “The greatest American short story writer of my generation was Flannery O’Connor.... She broke practically every one of my rules but the first. Great writers tend to do that.”

Vonnegut frequently used drawings such as these to illustrate story structure.



Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library

The Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library champions the literary, artistic, and cultural contributions of Hoosier writer and artist Kurt Vonnegut; serves as a cultural and educational resource facility, museum, art gallery, and reading room; supports language and arts education; and explores social issues through programs and outreach activities with other local and national groups. The organization supports Indianapolis public high school newspapers, awards scholarships through high school writing competitions, and brings together members of the Indianapolis writing community through visiting authors, artists, performers, and others. The Vonnegut Library aims to inspire and promote insightful writing and seeks to engage people, especially young people, in thinking about and expressing themselves with the written word. Visit the Vonnegut Library at 340 North Senate Avenue in Indianapolis.



<http://www.vonnegutlibrary.org>



*2013 IRT
Summer Conservatory students
at the Vonnegut Library.*

Common Core & Indiana State Standards

Attending *Who Am I This Time?* along with using the discussion questions, writing projects, and activities in our study guide can link your lessons to the following Common Core or Indiana State Standards:

Language Arts:

Reading Standards for Literature/Key Ideas and Details

Reading Standards for Literature/Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Reading Standards for Literature/Craft and Structure

Writing Standards:

Write narrative to develop
real or imagined experiences

Theatre Arts:

Analysis and Response

Performance Style

*This mural by Pamela Bliss on
Massachusetts Avenue in Indianapolis is
called My Affair with Kurt Vonnegut.*

*The mural was created using a compilation
of images from the following sources and
with the permission of members of the
Vonnegut family: the Kurt Vonnegut
Memorial Library, artist Shannon Linker
(Indianapolis, Indiana), and Gina Ayvazian
(Northampton, Massachusetts).*



Discussion Questions

Think about Kurt Vonnegut's signature phrase, "So it goes." What does it mean? What feelings does the phrase suggest? How does it express emotions and ideas found in Vonnegut's works? How does it relate to each of the three stories in this play?

What different kinds of love do you see in the stories of this play? What do these stories suggest about the idea of conventional, romantic love? What do these stories suggest about passion vs. romance? How do different relationships in the play contradict each other?

Discuss the third, unseen character in "Long Walk to Forever," Catherine's fiancé, Henry Chasens. How do you imagine that he and Newt might be different? How might they be the same? What would be the differences and/or similarities between Catherine's relationship with Henry and her relationship with Newt? How would Newt and Catherine's future relationship be different from their past relationship?

Look at the characters in "Who Am I This Time?" How do Harry's job at the hardware store and Helene's job with the phone company affect their interactions with people? In what different ways is each character socially inhibited? How might these characters' inability to communicate face-to-face relate to today's obsession with social networking? How do such activities as texting, blogging, and tweeting aid communication today? How do they hinder interpersonal relationships? How do such elements as facial expression and tone of voice affect your understanding in face-to-face conversation? How does the lack of such elements affect on-line communication?

In "Who Am I This Time?" what does Helene's interest in movie stars suggest about her? What does Harry's ability to inhabit roles so unlike his own persona suggest about him? What does this story suggest about the transformative power of art? What does it suggest about the relationship between truth and fiction? In your own life, when do you find yourself donning other "roles" in order to navigate certain situations? When is such behavior healthy? When is it not?

In "Go Back to Your Precious Wife and Son," what is George's vision of life as a Hollywood screenwriter? What is the reality of his relationship with Gloria Hilton? How does Tom's dream of selling windows to a large hotel compare to George's dream? How does Tom's relationship with his wife Kate differ from George's relationship with Gloria? What does Kate's response to Tom's night out suggest about her view of marriage?

Writing Prompts

Many of Kurt Vonnegut's works, such as "Long Walk to Forever," contain elements of autobiography. Choose an episode from your own life and use it to craft a fictional short story. Who are your characters? How are they the same as or different from the real people in your life? How might events from your actual experience be changed or rearranged to tell a better, more interesting story? Use Kurt Vonnegut's "8 Rules of Writing Fiction" on page 12 as guidelines. Are there any of these rules you feel it is important to ignore? Why?

Write your own autobiography, up to the present moment. Then continue to write, imagining your own future. What do you think your life will be like in five years? Ten years?

Choose one of your favorite short stories. Write a stage or film adaptation. How might the story need to be altered for your chosen dramatic medium? Who are the characters? What actors might play these characters? What are the ideas or themes in the story that you want to emphasize in your adaptation? How does the narrative voice of the story's writer transfer to the medium of film or theatre? How does dialogue function? How might music be used in your work? If your adaptation is a film, how might the story need to be altered for location or studio shooting? If your adaptation is a play, what is the setting? If there are multiple settings, how might this be accomplished on stage?

Write a review of the play. What moments made an impression on you? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Post your review on the IRT website: <http://reviews.irtlive.com/>

Activities

In *Who Am I This Time? (and Other Conundrums of Love)*, the central character, Tom, functions as a narrator, a storyteller. Choose an episode from your own life that was interesting, amusing, or exciting. Think about how you have told this story in conversation. What has made this an effective story? Prepare to tell this story in class. Which details are important, and which are extraneous? How do you create suspense? How does your story have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Is there a moral or lesson to the story? What word choices, gestures, and vocalizations can make your story more engaging? As each person in class tells his or her story, note how he or she makes the story come alive for the audience.

Film or produce the screenplay or stage script you adapted above. How does the process of collaboration affect what you have written? When might it be necessary to alter your script in order to accommodate production needs? When is it important to stick to the words written and find other solutions to production challenges?

Resources

Other Books

Kurt Vonnegut: Letters edited by Dan Wakefield (2012)

And So It Goes—Kurt Vonnegut: A Life by Charles J. Shields (2011)

Unstuck in Time: A Journey through Kurt Vonnegut's Life and Novels
by Gregory D. Sumner (2011)

Kurt Vonnegut's America by Jerome Klinkowitz (2009)

Vonnegut and Me: Conversations and Close Encounters by Greg Mitchell (2013; Kindle edition)

Just Like Someone without Mental Illness Only More So by Mark Vonnegut (2010)

The Eden Express: A Memoir of Insanity by Mark Vonnegut (1975)

Websites

<http://www.vonnegutlibrary.org>

Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library in Indianapolis

<http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/lilly/mss/index.php?p=vonnegut>

Lilly Library collection of Kurt's Vonnegut's papers at Indiana University, Bloomington

<http://boingboing.net/2012/09/25/how-to-write-with-style-by-ku.html>

Kurt Vonnegut's "How to Write with Style"

<http://www.vonnegut.com/>

Collection of Vonnegut's art as produced and sold by silkscreen artist Joe Petro

YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ>

Vonnegut demonstrates the “simple shapes of stories”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdANEImRU6k>

PBS interview with Vonnegut (2005)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojMAgsfgPiA>

WFYI interview with Kurt Vonnegut (1991, part 1 of 4)

DVDs

A Man without a Country (2012, documentary)

2081 (2010, based on “Harrison Bergeron”)

Breakfast of Champions (1999)

Mother Night (1996)

Who Am I This Time? (1982)

Slaughterhouse-Five (1972)

Glossary

Abe Lincoln in Illinois

Abe Lincoln in Illinois by Robert E. Sherwood opened on Broadway in 1938 and ran for more than a year, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play covers the life of President Abraham Lincoln from his early manhood in Salem, Illinois, through his election as president.

An Actor Prepares

An Actor Prepares is the first of Konstantin Stanislavski's books on acting. It is written as the diary of a fictional student during his first year of training in Stanislavski's system.

Americana

Encyclopedia Americana, first published in 1829.

Anne of Green Gables

Anne of Green Gables is a best-selling 1908 novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery. It recounts the adventures of Anne Shirley, a young orphan girl adopted by farmers. The book has sold more than 50 million copies and has been adapted many times for stage, film, and television.

Anne of the Thousand Days

Anne of the Thousand Days by Maxwell Anderson opened on Broadway in 1948 and ran for nine months. The play focuses on the relationship between Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn, who was Queen of England for just less than three years.

Austen, Jane

The novels of Jane Austen (1775–1817) include *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Emma* (1816). Austen's plots, although fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security.

Belle Reve

French: beautiful dream. Blanche and Stella's family home in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Ben-Hur

Published in 1880, *Ben-Hur* by lifelong Hoosier Lew Wallace recounts the story of Judah Ben-Hur, a Jewish prince who survives a series of hardships and adventures to become an early Christian. The 1959 MGM film adaptation was seen by tens of millions and won 11 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

Bogart, Humphrey

Humphrey Bogart (1899–1957) often played the role of a hard-boiled cynic who ultimately shows his noble side. His classic films include *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *The African Queen* (1951, Academy Award for Best Actor), and *The Caine Mutiny* (1954).

Brando, Marlon

Marlon Brando (1924–2004) was hailed for bringing a gripping realism to film acting. He is most famous for his Oscar-winning performances in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *The Godfather* (1972), as well as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), in the role he had originated on Broadway.

Britannica

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* is regarded as one of the most scholarly of English-language encyclopedias. It was first published in 1768.

Bronte

The Brontë sisters, Charlotte (1816-1855), Emily (1818-1848), and Anne (1820-1849), are well known as poets and novelists. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, and to a lesser extent, Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are considered masterpieces of literature.

The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial

The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial by Herman Wouk, adapted from his own Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, opened on Broadway in 1954, as did a film adaptation titled *The Caine Mutiny*. In each version, Captain Queeg carries a pair of steel bearing balls that he uses like worry beads when he is stressed.

Cemetery

The Cemeteries line of the New Orleans streetcar system ran along Canal Street from St. Charles Street to the Greenwood Cemetery.

Day, Doris

Despite dramatic roles in *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955) and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), Doris Day (born 1924) is mostly known for her work in musicals such as *Calamity Jane* (1953) and romantic comedies such as *Pillow Talk* (1959). She was the #1 box office star in America in 1960, '62, '63, and '64.

Desire

Desire Street in New Orleans, Louisiana, is said to be a misspelled homage to Désirée Clary, a fiancé of Napoleon. The former streetcar line with this name ran through the French Quarter.

Elysian Fields

Elysian Fields Avenue in New Orleans is named after the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris. In Greek mythology, Elysium (or the Elysian Fields) was the final resting place of the souls of the heroic and the virtuous, where they would remain after death in blessed happiness.

Ernest ... Cecily ... “the visible personification of absolute perfection”

In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Algernon Moncrieff (pretending to be named Ernest) loves Cecily Cardew. In Act II, he says, “I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.”

“Flores! Flores para los muertos!”

Spanish: “Flowers! Flowers for the dead!”

Fort Bragg

A large US Army post located in south-central North Carolina, where as many as 159,00 soldiers were stationed during World War II.

Great Depression

The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the 1930s. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the 20th century.

Hawai'i

In 1962, Hawaii, the newest state (1959), was exotic and unfamiliar to mainland Americans.

Henry VIII

Henry VIII (1491–1547) was King of England from 1509 until his death. He is remembered for his six marriages, and for separating the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church.

Hitler's invasion of Poland

Although Hitler had signed a nonaggression pact with Poland in 1934, Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. The Polish army was defeated within weeks.

Homo Erectus ... Homo Sapiens ... Homo Eros

Homo is the human genus, which includes Neanderthals and many other extinct species. *Homo erectus* (Latin: "upright man") is an extinct species that lived from 1.8 million years ago to 143,000 years ago. *Homo sapiens* (Latin: "wise man") is the only surviving species of the genus *Homo*; it first appeared 200,000 years ago. Eros, in Greek mythology, was the god of love.

Kennedy, Jackie

At the time of the play in 1962, when Jacqueline Kennedy was serving as First Lady, she was particularly known for her work in restoring the White House.

Leigh, Vivien

British actress Vivien Leigh (1913-1967) won two Best Actress Academy Awards for her performances as southern belles: Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and Blanche DuBois in the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). She was also an acclaimed theatre actress and often appeared on stage with her second husband, Laurence Olivier.

Lincoln, Abraham

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) was the 16th President of the United States, serving from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Lincoln led the United States through its greatest constitutional, military, and moral crisis—the American Civil War—and in so doing preserved the Union and abolished slavery.

Life

Life magazine was launched in 1936 and published weekly until 1972. It was the first all-photographic American news magazine, and it dominated the market for more than 40 years.

Look

Look was a bi-weekly, general-interest magazine published from 1937 to 1971, with more of an emphasis on photographs than articles. It was generally considered the also-ran to *Life* magazine.

Napoleonic Code

The Napoleonic Code is the French civil code established under Napoléon I in 1804. Louisiana is unique among the 50 states in having a legal system primarily based on French and Spanish codes and ultimately Roman law, as opposed to English common law. Despite popular belief, however, it is incorrect to say that the Louisiana Civil Code stems from the Napoleonic Code; rather, the two law codes stem from common sources.

Neapolitan Code

Neapolitan is the adjectival form of Naples, a city in Italy. In the United States, the word is perhaps most associated with Neapolitan ice cream, a mixture of chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry ice cream side-by-side in the same container.

penicillin

Penicillin is a group of antibiotics that are historically significant because they are the first drugs that were effective against many previously serious diseases such as syphilis and certain infections. Penicillins are still widely used today, although many types of bacteria have now become resistant.

ptomaine

An early theory on the causes of food poisoning involved ptomaines, alkaloids found in decaying animal and vegetable matter. The discovery of bacteria left the ptomaine theory obsolete.

putz

a stupid or worthless person; from a Yiddish vulgarism for penis

Rhett and Scarlett

Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara are the tempestuous lovers at the center of *Gone with the Wind*.

Robinson, Will

"Danger, Will Robinson!" is a catchphrase from the television series *Lost in Space*, which ran from 1965 to 1968 and focused on a family marooned on a distant planet. Although the family's robot often said "Warning!" or "Danger!" in such situations, it said "Danger, Will Robinson!" only once in the entire series. Nonetheless the phrase caught on and has been heard often since.

Rutledge, Ann

Although much of her life is lost to history and subject to debate, but some historians believe that Ann Rutledge (1813-1835) was the first love of Abraham Lincoln. It is thought that her death of typhoid at the age of 22 plunged Lincoln into a severe depression.

School for the Blind

Established in 1847, the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired is located at 7725 North College Avenue, Indianapolis. Approximately 150 to 175 students attend the institution, from pre-school to high school, up to age 22. The campus features several acres of forested and rolling hills, as well as a tall brick bell tower. Kurt Vonnegut's boyhood home was located in nearby Williams Creek.

seven card stud

Seven-card stud is a variant of stud poker. Until the recent increase in popularity of Texas hold 'em, seven-card stud was the most popular poker variant in home games across the United States, as well as in casinos in the eastern part of the country.

the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question

The \$64,000 Question was an American game show, broadcast from 1955 to 1958. The game consisted of answering increasingly difficult questions, starting with a prize of \$1 and ending with \$64,000. "That's the \$64,000 question" became a common catchphrase for a particularly difficult question or problem.

A Streetcar Named Desire

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams opened on Broadway in 1947 and ran for two years, receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play focuses on conflicts between Blanche DuBois, a fading Southern belle whose pretensions to virtue and culture only thinly mask her alcoholism and delusions of grandeur; and her brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski, a primal, rough-hewn, sensual brute. Although Stanley is physically and emotionally abusive, he shares a powerful, even animal-like sexual chemistry with his wife Stella—Blanche's sister.

Unitarian Church

Unitarianism is a theological movement named for its understanding of God as one person, in direct contrast to Trinitarianism, which defines God as three persons coexisting consubstantially as one being. Today Unitarianism is considered one of the most liberal Christian denominations. Although Kurt Vonnegut described himself variously as a skeptic, freethinker, humanist, agnostic, and atheist, he also sometimes said he was a Unitarian Universalist. His parents were married by a Unitarian minister, and he was at one time a member of a Unitarian congregation.

Going to the Theatre: Audience Role & Responsibility

You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance.

Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:



Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.