

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

## ***Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

### **English Language Arts, 12th Grade**

#### WHAT'S THE STORY?

Billy Pilgrim, the novel's protagonist, has become "unstuck in time." He travels between periods of his life, unable to control which period he lands in. As a result, the narrative is not chronological or linear. Instead, it jumps back and forth in time and place. The novel is structured in small sections, each several paragraphs long, that describe various moments of his life.

Billy Pilgrim is born in 1922 and grows up in Ilium, New York. A funny-looking, weak youth, he does reasonably well in high school, enrolls in night classes at the Ilium School of Optometry, and is drafted into the army during World War II. He trains as a chaplain's assistant in South Carolina, where an umpire officiates during practice battles and announces who survives and who dies before they all sit down to lunch together. Billy's father dies in a hunting accident shortly before Billy ships overseas to join an infantry regiment in Luxembourg. Billy is thrown into the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium and is immediately taken prisoner behind German lines. Just before his capture, he experiences his first incident of time—shifting: he sees the entirety of his life, from beginning to end, in one sweep.

#### CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM\*

*The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.*

- **Unit 1: Language and Perspective**
  - Essential Question: "How does language influence perspective?"
- **Unit 2: Complex Issues**
  - Essential Questions: "How can examining complex issues from different perspectives influence people?" "How can we effectively present ideas and address other viewpoints?"
- **Unit 3: Personal Responsibility**
  - Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"
- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
  - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

#### KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems. RL.12.13
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.12.2
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.12.5
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.12.3
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.12.4
- Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant. RL.12.6
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text. RL.12.7
- Demonstrate knowledge of foundational works of American and world literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics. RL.12.9
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. RL.12.10
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.12