

Slaughterhouse five siftt sean lawson essay sample

War



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Slaughterhouse Five, a novel written by Kurt Vonnegut, contains numerous examples of symbolism, imagery, figurative language, tone, and theme. The story isn't very chronological, every thing happens bunched up together. There are numerous settings in the novel. A large portion of the action of the story occurs in the small town of Ilium, New York, where Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of the novel, was born. Having grown up in Ilium, he settles there after fighting in World War II. He also becomes an optometrist, marries, and raises two children in Ilium. Germany is another setting in the book, particularly the city of Dresden. During the war, Billy is sent to Dresden to do hard labor. During his stay, the city is bombed and totally destroyed. Billy, some other Americans, and a few German guards hide in the basement of Slaughterhouse Five during the bombing and manage to escape unharmed. Another setting in the book is the planet of Tralfamadore, where Billy is taken by aliens. There he is held captive and displayed in a zoo, along with his earthling mate, Montana Wildhack. Their room in the zoo is loaded with items from earth and has a dome for a roof so that the Tralfamadoreans can peep on the earthlings. The settings of the book are hard to keep up with because they are constantly changing due to Billy's mind traveling capabilities. Billy's antagonist is really himself. He is too weak to control his life, instead, he allows fate to rule his existence. Although he has the ability to time travel, he does nothing to control his journeys and lives in constant dread of where he is going to find himself next. He also dwells on the horrors that he experienced in war.

Symbolism is hard to find in the novel, but I'm sure it's everywhere. One example of symbolism that I found occurs in Billy. Whenever Billy gets cold, <https://assignbuster.com/slaughterhouse-five-sifft-sean-lawson-essay-sample/>

his feet turn blue and ivory. These cold, corpse-like colors, to me, suggest the fragility of the thin boundary between life and death. Another interesting thing I noticed as I read the novel is the use of the phrase, "So it goes." This phrase is used over one hundred times throughout the novel. Authors don't usually use a phrase that many times unless it means something. The phrase, "So it goes," follows every mention of death in the novel, equalizing all of them, whether they are natural, accidental, or intentional, and whether they occur on a massive scale or on a very personal one. The phrase reflects a kind of comfort in the Tralfamadorian idea that although a person may be dead in a particular moment, he or she is alive in all the other moments of his or her life, which exist together and can be visited over and over through time travel. At the same time, though, the repetition of the phrase keeps a tally of deaths throughout the novel, thus pointing out the tragic inevitability of death.

Vonnegut's uses many images to enhance the overall effect of Slaughterhouse Five. Throughout the novel, in both war scenes and in Billy's travels back and forward in time, the many images produce a believable story of the unusual life of Billy Pilgrim. Vonnegut uses color imagery, repetitive images, and images of pain and suffering to develop the novel and create situations that the reader can visualize. At another point in the novel, Billy describes his first time traveling experience. He began to "swing grandly through the full arc of his life, passing into death, which was violet light . . . going backwards into pre-birth, which was red light and bubbling sounds". The careful and vivid depiction of colors enables the reader to relate to the experience.

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Examples of figurative language is also used by Vonnegut throughout the novel. Under morphine in the prison camp, Billy has another of his peaceful hallucinations. This time he's a giraffe in a beautiful garden, and the only violence in the scene is Billy's chewing on a tough pear. The giraffes represent a metaphor for human beings, creatures who are as "preposterously specialized" as giraffes. The narrator opens with a hyperbole of a subtitle for the book, explaining that he is a veteran living in easy circumstances, who witnessed the bombing of Dresden, Germany as a prisoner of war and survived to tell the tale in the manner of the planet of Tralfamadore where the flying saucers come from. He went back to Dresden with a war buddy years later.

He ends the first chapter saying that his war novel, his novel of looking back is over, since there is nothing intelligent one can say about a massacre. "Knives and needles and razorblades," that rain down from "the incredible artificial weather Earthlings sometimes create for other Earthlings when they don't want those other Earthlings to inhabit Earth any more." There are no bullets per set, just "little lumps of lead in copper jackets... zipping along much faster than sound." These images are examples of euphemism, the "nice" way of describing something unpleasant.

The author portrays a noticeable tone throughout the novel. Vonnegut's accepting attitude towards death emphasises his casual, inevitable tone. His tone is very calm throughout the novel. Since the author is portrayed definitely in the first and last chapter, and occasionally throughout the book,

the tone can be certain. Since the author is in war time, we can assume that the tone is a scared one.

In Slaughterhouse Five, there were a major and minor theme. The major theme of the book is the role of fate in life. Billy never seizes control of his existence, but allows himself to be ruled by chance. When he begins to time travel, he does nothing to try and control when or where he is taken on his journeys. Knowing he is to be kidnapped, he goes out to meet the Tralfamadorians, offering no resistance. While on Tralfamadore, he accepts the philosophy of these aliens without question and begins to believe, like them, in the inevitability of what has happened, is happening, and will happen. The minor theme in the book is pretty much understandable from the first chapter. The minor theme of the novel is the inhumanity of war, as seen in the destruction of Dresden. Vonnegut is clearly pointing out in the novel that voluntary violence of any sort, particularly that perpetrated by a war, is completely unjustifiable and senseless.

Furthermore, examples of symbolism, imagery, figurative language, tone, and theme make this novel a great experience to read. The symbolism lets the reader drift off into the novel, letting ordinary things stand for something more than what they really are. The imagery puts the reader into the situation that the author is trying to portray. The use of figurative language enhances the meaning of the work. The tone allows the reader to put themselves in the mind of the author. The theme helps the reader gain a better understanding for what they just read, like a lesson. All these things make this novel a great reading experience.