

# Violence in "slaughterhouse five" by kurt vonnegut essay sample

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## **Violence in “Slaughterhouse Five” by Kurt Vonnegut Essay Sample**

Kurt Vonnegut's novel "Slaughterhouse Five" presents a story of the firebombing of Dresden during World War II. The author opens the book with an autobiographical first chapter explaining the process of writing his anti-war novel. He explains that he himself was a prisoner in Germany and witnessed the bombing of Dresden. The inspiration to write this novel was from his experience in war. The story focuses around the main character Billy Pilgrim; before, during and after war. It is clearly illustrated throughout the novel the different forms of violence and how it affects people. From the first chapter up to the last, we learn that one of the characters was killed for stealing a teapot. This is a very potent memory for both Billy Pilgrim and Kurt Vonnegut as it is reinforced throughout the novel. The author uses this memory to show how people were vile and disheartening during the war. He vividly described those violent experiences to send a message to individuals that war is destructive and pointless. There were sections in the novel that depicted humans as being cold and unremorseful especially when they dealt with dead bodies as Vonnegut describes the terrible conditions of the Americans who were loaded into the boxcars and the pathetically weak and ridiculous bodies of the prisoners of war and Billy "...seeing little logs lying around. There were people who had been caught in the fire storm. So it goes."

Edgar Derby describes the horrible conditions he and the troops were subjected to before they surrendered. The bombing was depicted as "

terrible weather of knives and razors for Earthlings who others do not want to inhabit the earth any longer." This section shows that violence leads to wrongful acts against human beings which are poignant because we are taught since we were children that it is wrong to harm other people. Another example was when they Billy and other prisoners were starved on the trip to Dresden and because they had not eaten for days, the good act of Englishmen to give them food resulted in disaster because they had diarrhea.

The prisoners of war are forced into the awful task of digging up the bodies of the dead in Dresden after it is bombed and this resulted in one man dying because he cannot stand the smell. This scene is an example of physiological and psychological violence that can be a cause for trauma to occur.

' You know we've had to imagine the war here, and we have imagined that it was being fought by aging men like ourselves. We had forgotten that wars were fought by babies. When I saw those freshly shaved faces, it was a shock " My God, my God—" I said to myself. " It's the Children's Crusade.'

In chapter one of the novel, the author overtly describes his sentiment about war. It is a fact that most men that were drafted for war were teenagers or young adults who were put into battle unprepared and naïve. And the story goes further by showing the consequences of war to the soldiers and their families: When Billy and Weary were captured by the Germans; instead of focusing on the victory, he focused on the aftereffects of this victory.

Another instance was during the Lion's Club meeting. The Marine thinks of

war as glorious and heroic and that Billy should be proud that his son was in the Green Berets however Billy thought otherwise. It was not the sense or victory and heroicism that overcame him as he remembers the war but the hurt, the trauma, and the killings were the one that stuck to his mind until he aged. The same feeling occurred during the plane crash when he seemed to think he has been injured in battle after the plane crash and whispers the address where he lived in Germany to those who rescued him.

Vonnegut used violence to send the message across the readers. By putting a fictional character in the story, the circumstances became more personal and real for the reader rather than reading about the war and what happened during the war in a global and factual perspective. With this latter technique, people would say, "Hey, if it doesn't happen close to home, I wouldn't worry." But by this technique, he was putting across a message but not being too authoritative and forceful about it.

#### Works Cited

Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five. United States: Delacorte Press, 1969.