

MAJOR WORKS Annotations & Information sheet

<p>Title: Cat's Cradle Author: Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Date of Publication: 1963 Genre: Satire/ Science Fiction</p>	<p>Biographical Information about the Author</p>
<p>Historical & Cultural context</p>	<p>Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis in 1922. His siblings went to private school but he had to go to public school because of the depression's impact on the family's finances. He edited the school newspaper. He went to Cornell to study biochemistry. He much preferred to write and edit. He was going to get expelled but he joined the Army. His mother committed suicide while he was at war. He was captured by the Germans. He was forced to work in a factory in Dresden (the location of his other book, Slaughterhouse 5). This made him a pacifist. He went to u-chicago. He attempted suicide in 1984.</p>
<p>Vonnegut had experienced a lot of hardship from war and became a pacifist. The influences that led to his books were mainly World War II, but he published during the height of the Vietnam war. The most important things that led to the books were the bombing of Dresden which was remarkably brutal. It was portrayed in horrific detail in Slaughterhouse five.</p>	<p>Characteristics of the Genre</p>
<p>Plot Summary: make a bulleted list highlighting the main events and twists of the plot, 15 items maximum</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The narrator, John, writes to Newt Hoenikker to describe what he remembered from the day the bomb destroyed Hiroshima. Newt says he was playing with trucks while his father was playing cat's cradle with a piece of string. • Newt describes how he ran away from his father when he tried to show him the game, and then the siblings got into a quarrel. After he got the letter back from Newt, it was released that Newt and Zinka, a Russian dancer were engaged. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John travels to the place where the family lived during WWII and hears that Frank was a strange character and Emily, Felix's wife, died in childbirth likely due to a pelvic injury she sustained during a car accident. He was told this by Asa, Felix's former research supervisor. • Asa showed John around the lab and told John that Felix once thought of an isotope of water, called ice-nine, that would instantly freeze any mud. John was afraid of the power of this isotope and asked if Felix succeeded in constructing it. Asa denied it, but he ended the interview because he thought John was saying that scientists were dangerous. • John goes to the cemetery to take a picture of Felix's grave and is told by Martin, Asa's brother, that Felix had not bothered to buy Emily's tombstone and that Frank bought the tombstone. Martin disliked Felix. Martin did not think any one who assisted in building the atomic bomb could be innocent. It is also revealed that Martin had been in love with Emily (also possibly contributing to his despise of Felix). • John didn't know this, but Felix actually had made ice-nine and never mentioned it. He gave the isotope to his children. Frank used it to get a job as Major General on the island republic of San Lorenzo. Angela traded hers to marry to the handsome Harrison Conners, a top-secret weapons scientist, and Zinka stole Newt's to give to the Soviets!! • At this time, John was writing an article about Julian Castle, a philanthropist living on San Lorenzo, where Frank was the major general. On the plane to the island, John met Lowe, Hazel, and Horlick, Claire (couples respectively). Lowe was going to open a bike factory because of the no labor restrictions. Horlick was the new ambassador. Angela and Newt also happened to be on the plane they were going to celebrate Frank's engagement to Mona who was the daughter of the island's dictator. • All of the people on the island were Bokoninists, a religion created by Bokonon. This guy and his friend, McCabe, wanted to make the island a utopia. The island's control was mercurial. Nobody fought back when they took over. They couldn't make it better so they made it so they instituted a religion and banned it so that it made it seem appealing. 	

- Monzano named Frank his successor because he was dying. Frank didn't want the job so he offered it to John. John didn't want it at first but when he heard he would get to marry Mona, he agreed. He was thinking about unbanning the religion but he realized that it was necessary for everyone to be satisfied.
- A ceremony was going on when Monzano committed suicide. John looked at his body and saw that he had killed himself with ice-nine. John got all of Felix's children to come in to talk to him. They admitted to possessing the destructive isotope. They started to clean the room by melting the ice-nine but they decided to take a break before burning the bodies and then a plane crashed into the castle which brought rubble and Monzano's body into the sea. All of the world water turned to ice-nine in seconds!
- Mostly everyone on the island committed suicide...including Mona. John wrote this book. Newt painted, Hazel sewed, and Lowe cooked, and Frank studied ants. Bokonon finished writing the Books of Bokonon all of which talked about human stupidity.

Describe the author's style	An example that demonstrates that style
<p>The author's style is very similar to his style in Slaughterhouse five: he was Macabre and depressing. It was a very pessimistic view of the world. Within this pessimism is humor, though. It's a commentary on human's ability to be stupid and simultaneously ingenious enough to create weapons of mass destruction.</p>	<p>"Beware of the man who works hard to learn something, learns it, and finds himself no wiser than before," Bokonon tells us. "He is full of murderous resentment of people who are ignorant without having come by their ignorance the hard way."</p>

Memorable Quotes:	
Quotations (4 examples) w/page	Significance – in brief: save a full explication for your written analysis <i>--who, what, why, what difference it makes --</i>

<p>"All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies." – page 4</p> <p>"Had I been a Bokononist then, pondering the miraculously intricate chain of events that had brought dynamite money to that particular tombstone company, I might have whispered, "Busy, busy, busy." _Busy, busy, busy_, is what we Bokononists whisper whenever we think of how complicated and unpredictable the machinery of life really is. But all I could say as a Christian then was, "Life is sure funny sometimes." Page 32</p> <p>“</p> <p>I walked away from Frank, just as _The Books of Bokonon_ advised me to do. 'Beware of the man who works hard to learn something, learns it, and finds himself no wiser than before,' Bokonon tells us. 'He is full of murderous</p>	<p>This is in the start of the book when describing the Books of Bokonon. This was written by bokonon himself. It is to show that religion does not have to be founded in truth for it to do its job. In fact, it has no job or higher purpose other than keeping people happy.</p> <p>This is John talking. He is thinking about all of the little things that led to the use of money to build that tombstone under which Emily lies. This phrase is similar to "so it goes" from Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse 5" in which he takes something of a deterministic view of the out folding of events.</p> <p>This is John talking and the significance is that everyone comes to know their own ignorance in the end but it's just that some come to it in easier routes than others. I'd say that scientists come to see their own ignorance the fastest.</p>
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resentment of people who are ignorant without having come by their ignorance the hard way.” Page 103

“Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder, "Why, why, why?" Tiger got to sleep, Bird got to land; Man got to tell himself he understand.” Page 57

This is Castle quoting a poem. This is fantastic insight into the commonality of human experience. This shows how man has no purpose in life and that all of its efforts to understand are futile. There is no meaning to life. If you believe there is, then you’re deluded.

Characters

Name	Role in the Story	Significance	Adjectives
John	The narrator, he’s pretty much the protagonist, we follow him through all of the events	He set out to write a book about the day the bomb fell on Hiroshima, which led him to a terrible fate seeing the unfolding of the world.	Smart, ambitious, hapless
Bokonon	He started the entire society on the island essentially	He made the society what it was and symbolizes the dictators of that time	Powerful, intelligent, inventive
Angela Hoenikkler	Oldest child of Felix, she is tall while her brother is short.	She deluded herself into thinking her father was a saint. That symbolizes the theme of delusions to achieve happiness.	Tall, unattractive, objectified
Emily Hoenikkler	She’s the beautiful wife of Felix, she died while giving birth to Newt. She is underappreciated. She commits suicide.	She’s not an entirely significant character in my opinion, she just dies and nobody really cares for her	Unloved, neglected
Felix Hoenikkler	The father of all of the kids and he is a remarkable physicist and researcher. He was one of the men behind the atomic bomb and the creator of the isotope “ice-nine”.	His indifference to humanity leads to the destruction of the world, eventually. He was unemotional.	Brilliant, insensitive,
Newt Hoenikkler	He’s a midget who is taken advantage of by an undercover Russian spy.	He’s not entirely significant, he doesn’t really end up happy at all	insignificant

Setting (where + when)

This takes place partly the place where the family lived during WWII which was Ilium, New York and also on the island of San Lorenzo which is a fictional island.

Significance of opening scene

The book opens with the tenets of Bokononism. The tenets are saying that you cannot fully understand the world and your purpose in it but there is one but any

<p>The time it takes place is uncertain to me. It's certainly after World War II but it could be in the distance future after World War II. I'd say it was probably around the 1960s.</p>	<p>attempt to understand it is futile. This is a delusion that is to ensure that people continue to live happily. They believe that anything they do is God's will and that they are thus justified in every action. The significance is that the book of Bokononism says that it is based on lies, but yet it is still valid. This is to accentuate the fact that religion does not have to claim that it is true and that the entire purpose of religion is to inspire happiness and complacency.</p>
<p>Significance of ending/closing scene</p>	
<p>Symbols you notice and what they "mean"</p>	
<p>The cat's cradle is less of a symbol and more of a means of describing Felix's indifference toward the end of the world that he may have catalyzed. Another one of these things are the turtles; he was distracted from the bomb by the turtles. The cat's cradle could be an analogy to the life. The game itself is absolutely pointless and yet people engage themselves in it and try to find patterns. There's no cat nor is there any cradle, the entire game is a hoax. The game is pointless and it is without end.</p>	<p>The conclusion is that humanity deludes themselves into certainty about things that they cannot be certain about. Their significance is that there essentially is no significance. Life does not mean anything. The world can end in seconds and even if it couldn't, human's a groping the empty sky.</p>
<p>Major themes</p>	
<p>War, indifference, moral responsibility, sin, lust, frivolous indifference to catastrophic possibilities</p>	
<p>Essay topic ideas: 3 possibilities</p>	
<p>How will science determine the fate of the world? How does Vonnegut warn us about the destructive powers of science? How Vonnegut argue that man deluded himself into understanding a meaning of life? How does he show that there is none? How will ethics play a role in the development of technology?</p>	

Vonnegut's misguided perspective of Science

Vonnegut vicariously voices the opinion that scientists are "heartless, conscienceless, narrow boobies, indifferent to the fate of the rest of the human race, or maybe not really members of the human race at all" (Vonnegut, 39) and that Science is of a similar defiled nature. This opinion is strictly wrong and based on personal prejudices formed during Vonnegut's occupation of Dresden during the allied forces bombing that killed 100,000 innocent civilians. Vonnegut makes the invalid and unwarranted argument that science is a moral-less entity with complete disregard for the human condition.

"All the true things are shameless lies." (Vonnegut, 4). Although this excerpt in context only applies to the tenets of a religion adhered to by characters in the book, it reflects Vonnegut's outlook on reality. Thus, it

can be seen how Vonnegut's distaste for science exists: he believes that any body or field claiming to understand the truth merely employs a method of systematic delusion to induce bliss in its followers. Vonnegut's opinion is once again revealed in a quoted poem later in the novel:

**"Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder, "Why, why, why?"
Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand." (Vonnegut, 57).**

This passage embodies Vonnegut's opinions on science and religion, which he sees as having identical means: to delude the populous into satisfaction and the illusion of purpose. However, Vonnegut takes a less demeaning stance on religion as he sees it as a collection of "harmless untruths" (Vonnegut, 1) while he views science as something capable of delivering atrocities otherwise unattainable to man. Vonnegut also implies that scientists do not know of sin and thus commit it without regard when Felix watches as they "first tested a bomb out at Alamogordo" another scientist said, "Science has now known sin." Hoenikker replies, "What is sin?" (Vonnegut, 17). With this view, Vonnegut is being myopic and not considering that the atomic bomb (which, as seen by Vonnegut, is the crown jewel of science) was only engendered by scientists in order to resolve a political problem whose origins were likely the quest to overcome geographic inequalities driven by the universal human desire to maximize happiness. Although science may have been deliverer of this horrid tool, it was all of humanity who called for it. We see that not all scientists are oblivious to the consequences of their inventions: "Another guy came in, and he said he was quitting his job at the Research Laboratory; said anything a scientist worked on was sure to wind up as a weapon, one way or another. Said he didn't want to help politicians with their fugging wars anymore" (Vonnegut, p.26). The mistake of interpretation that Vonnegut makes is that he believes scientists are driven by the human implications of their discoveries rather than for the discovery itself; this believe is embodied in Felix's discovery of ice-nine being driven by the practical use of increasing troop mobility by freezing mud rather than being driven by the untainted pursuit of pure knowledge. Vonnegut thus erroneously concludes that all of science is driven by the practical uses of their discoveries. Scientific discoveries are by no means revered by their ability to provide practical advances, whether they be sinful or beneficial. An example is that of special relativity by Albert Einstein who became a household name as a result of a relatively fruitless (in terms of technology and practical application) discovery.

Vonnegut also portrays science as "magic that works" (Vonnegut , 97). By this, he implies that there are operations of science which are not revealed to the public and therefore science is in no way superior to religion in understanding what's true. Science is the means by which we come to understand the universe, not the means by which delude ourselves into believing we understand the universe as Vonnegut suggests by "Man got to tell himself he understand" (Vonnegut, 57). Of course the means by which we come to understand the universe could be wrong, but by no means is science intentionally deceptive.

It can thus be seen that Vonnegut's opinions and outlook on science are founded in prejudices. Despite of this fact, Vonnegut discusses remarkably profound existentialist topics which have enormous value.