

Contemporary Authors Series 2007

Reading Kurt Vonnegut AP English 12

As one of three components of your summer assignment, I have developed a program entitled the Contemporary Authors Series. This is an opportunity for you to have some control over your summer work, while exposing you to a contemporary author that you might not choose to read on your own. Our writer this year is Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), recently deceased, a man who has written, most notably, the novels Slaughterhouse-Five, Cat's Cradle, and Timequake. Mr. Vonnegut is the author of fourteen novels in all, eight short story collections, and numerous plays and articles. He, as the New York Times said of him after his death, "caught the temper of his times and the imagination of a generation," and likened his style of humor to that of Mark Twain's. Unique and thoroughly enjoyable, his works have become staples of the modern novel genre.



The Program

The Contemporary Authors Series allows you to select one work from a selected list of works from a chosen writer. The list appears below. You must select a **single** book, read it, do some minimal research, and complete the summer essay assignment which is given in this packet. You will have access to a BlackBoard Discussion Board if you have any questions for me, and a specific board developed to help you discuss your book with your classmates. I will accept the typed summer essay on the first Monday of school (Monday, September 10, 2007). Discussion board requirements are listed on the next page.

Research

Please explore Kurt Vonnegut's obituary (included on next page). All other research will be up to you. I am primarily looking for your independent, unvarnished response to the text you choose, though. Little research is necessary outside of the reading of the selected book.

PLEASE CHOOSE ONE (1) NOVEL FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:

<u>Slaughterhouse-Five</u>	<u>Cat's Cradle</u>	<u>Galapagos</u>
<u>Timequake</u>	<u>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</u>	<u>Breakfast of Champions</u>



Contemporary Authors Series Summer Assignments

1. Pick a book from the list on the next page and read it. Vonnegut wrote many books of short stories, essays and plays, but these are off limit. Limit your selection to one of the six novels listed above.
2. Read the background info on Vonnegut. You may do more outside research, but it is not necessary.
3. Contribute to **one (1)** of the six Kurt Vonnegut Discussion Boards available to you (presumably, you'll select the board that is dedicated to the novel you read). The boards will be posted on July 23, 2007, but you have until September 9, 2007 to respond. You will be required to contribute at least three (3) responses to your selected board. This will garner an English grade of 35 points.
4. Write your critical essay (a 50 point essay). It is due **September 10, 2007**. Read the following essay assignment below:

Vonnegut Summer Essay:

Elements of pathos, fantasy, didacticism and dark humor merge in Vonnegut's novels to provide an arresting mixture of entertainment and biting social critique. John Updike has praised Vonnegut as a rare "imager, as distinguished from a reporter or a self-dramatizer," while Jay MacInerney describes him as "a satirist with a heart, a moralist with a whoopee cushion, a cynic who wants to believe. His fiercest social criticism is usually disguised in parable." One theme that emerges consistently in Vonnegut's works is the importance of basic human decency in a world of madness, chaos and pain (<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/vonnegutkurt.html>). From your reading of one of the novels listed above, discuss how the novel shows such human decency in a world of madness, chaos, and pain. Think hard about this, talk about it in the discussion boards, and write a good, solid essay.

Write the 3- 5 page paper, type it, and hand it in on **September 10, 2007**.