

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON KURT VONNEGUT, "HARRISON BERGERON," AND URSULA LEGUIN, "THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS"

Part 1

1. Explain and discuss in your groups the plot of the two stories. Be sure to address all of the plot terms as appropriate, as well as character and a comprehensive explanation for setting. What is the point of view in each story?
2. Look at how irony may have developed in the two stories. Explain and discuss it in detail.
3. Examine any symbols that might be read in both stories. What forms do these take and what meanings may be derived from them?
4. Discuss the various themes in both stories.
5. Consider the imagery that stands out in each story.
6. Examine the stories in terms of tone and style.

Part 2

1. Why does Vonnegut frame Harrison's rebellion, the main action, with the account of his parents' ordinary lives?
2. What are the three main parts of Le Guin's story, and what is accomplished in each of them?
3. Why do both stories end without resolving the basic conflicts they represent?
4. Who are the protagonists and antagonists in these stories (assuming you have not covered these categories in part 1)?
5. In what ways does Harrison represent both supremely heroic qualities and potentially destructive ones?
6. Why does Le Guin deal only with the group of people who chose to walk away from Omelas and not particular individuals?
7. How do both writers use their protagonists to develop the theme of the rights of the individual in conflict with the good of the group?

8. How do Vonnegut and Le Guin undermine the apparent reality of the worlds they create so that we focus on thematic implications rather than the places themselves?
9. What do the two imagined worlds have in common?
10. What specific issues in contemporary culture do you see implicitly depicted in the two worlds of the stories?
11. Why does Vonnegut employ an objective narrator who offers no interpretation of judgments about the story he tells?
12. Why does Le Guin create a narrator who is intrusive, who reminds us again and again that she is creating a world as we read?
13. What are the advantages of each of these points of view in creating the themes of the stories?
14. How is the depiction of pain in these stories used to generate emotional as well as intellectual responses to the issues raised?
15. What is morally ambiguous about the choice of a few to walk away from Omelas?
16. What is the ambiguity in Harrison's heroic rebellion against his society?
17. Why do Vonnegut and Le Guin leave the evil in their created worlds unreformed?