

Harrison Bergeron

by Kurt Vonnegut

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: calibrated, consternation, cowered, hindrances, impediment, luminous, offset, symmetry, synchronizing, vigilance

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

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Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

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Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.



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Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. She **calibrated** the thermometer for the Celsius scale.

- A. protected from damage
- B. used carefully
- C. marked with a standard scale

2. To the **consternation** of passengers, the pilot announced that the engine had failed and they would be making an emergency landing.

- A. doubt and anger
- B. pride and relief
- C. dismay and worry

3. She **covered** behind her big sister.

- A. stood proudly
- B. walked slowly
- C. fearfully crouched or hid

4. Despite the many **hindrances** in her path, she found a way to succeed.

- A. sources of encouragement
- B. unexpected changes in plan
- C. things that make progress difficult

5. His fear of flying was a serious **impediment** to his career in international business.

- A. something that builds confidence
- B. something that interferes or slows progress
- C. a natural talent or advantage

6. The snow was **luminous** from the moonlight.

- A. barely visible
- B. glowing or shining
- C. freezing cold

7. She hoped that her strong test scores would **offset** her weaker homework grades.

- A. make up for or counterbalance
- B. draw attention away from
- C. add on top of

8. There was a pleasing **symmetry** to the arrangement of the garden—every row evenly spaced, every hedge the same height.

- A. surprising and unusual features
- B. balanced and orderly arrangement
- C. bright and vivid coloring

9. The band members practiced **synchronizing** their movements so they would all step together.

- A. performing to impress a crowd
- B. competing to be the fastest
- C. coordinating to happen at the same time

10. The lifeguard's constant **vigilance** kept everyone at the beach safe.

- A. physical strength
- B. careful watchfulness
- C. friendly attitude

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

handicap (in this story) — a device or condition imposed by the government to limit a person's natural abilities, enforcing equality

Handicapper General — the official who enforces equality by assigning handicaps

birdshot — tiny lead pellets, used in the story as weight in handicap bags

sashweights — heavy weights (originally used in windows) worn as handicaps

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	C
2	C
3	C
4	C
5	B
6	B
7	A
8	B
9	C
10	B

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 “All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.”

As it is used in the excerpt, the word “vigilance” most nearly suggests that...

- A. the agents use physical force to punish anyone who breaks the law
- B. the government constantly monitors citizens for any sign of inequality
- C. the amendments are rarely challenged or tested

2 “It wasn’t clear at first as to what the bulletin was about, since the announcer, like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment.”

The information in this excerpt primarily functions to...

- A. suggest the announcer is nervous about the story he must deliver
- B. show that even the ability to speak clearly is restricted by handicaps
- C. explain why news reports are no longer trusted in 2081

3 “Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody.”

Which choice best describes the narrator’s attitude toward the ballerina’s voice?

- A. surprise that it sounds so ordinary
- B. admiration for its radiant beauty
- C. concern that it will attract punishment

4 “The picture showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet and inches.”

According to the passage, the calibrated background in Harrison’s photograph serves to...

- A. identify the prison where he was held
- B. show the size of his handicap equipment
- C. display his exact height measurement

5 “He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H–G men could think them up.”

It can reasonably be inferred that Harrison’s “hindrances” kept failing because...

- A. the H–G men deliberately gave him weak handicaps
- B. his abilities surpassed every limit the government imposed
- C. he found a way to secretly remove them

6 “Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard.”

Which choice best describes how this sentence functions in the text as a whole?

- A. it contrasts typical handicaps with Harrison’s extreme burden
- B. it shows that the government assigns handicaps fairly
- C. it suggests Harrison chose to add extra handicaps himself

7 “And to offset his good looks, the H–G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.”

The passage most strongly suggests that the disguises used to offset Harrison’s appearance reveal that he is...

- A. more dangerous than other prisoners
- B. naturally very handsome beneath them
- C. trying to hide his identity from the public

8 “Screams and barking cries of consternation came from the television set.”

In context, the word “consternation” emphasizes...

- A. the loud volume of the television set
- B. the terror and panic of the people in the studio
- C. the anger of the crowd toward Harrison

9 “Ballerinas, technicians, musicians, and announcers cowered on their knees before him, expecting to die.”

In the passage, the people in the studio are characterized as...

- A. terrified and helpless before Harrison
- B. respectful and obedient toward their new emperor
- C. too weighed down by their handicaps to stand

10 “The music began again and was much improved. Harrison and his Empress merely listened to the music for a while – listened gravely, as though synchronizing their heartbeats with it.”

The author most likely includes the detail about synchronizing their heartbeats in order to...

- A. suggest Harrison is using the music to calm his nerves
- B. show a deep connection between the dancers and the music
- C. prove that the musicians are finally playing at the right tempo

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	TEACHER NOTE
1	B	
2	B	The phrase "like all announcers" is the key — the impediment is standard-issue, not personal.
3	B	
4	C	
5	B	
6	A	
7	B	
8	B	
9	A	
10	B	