Harrison Bergeron
Short Story by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Introducing the Short Story
Literary Analysis: Plot and Conflict
Reading Skill: Draw Conclusions
Vocabulary in Context
INTRODUCING THE SHORT STORY

What if everyone were THE SAME?

What would the world be like if everyone were the same—

average in intelligence, talents, appearance, and strength—and no one was better than anyone else?
INTRODUCING THE SHORT STORY

What if everyone were THE SAME?

How do you think people would feel and act toward each other?

Would they be happy and satisfied?
What if everyone were THE SAME?

**BRAINSTORM**
With your class, brainstorm possible advantages and disadvantages of a world where everyone is the same—exactly average.

Advantages | Disadvantages
---|---
no more jealousy | nothing to live up to

Try to generate as many ideas as possible.
The plot of a story is driven by a **conflict**, or struggle between opposing forces.

In some stories, the conflict is between the main character and society.
In “Harrison Bergeron,” for example, the title character struggles with U.S. society in the year 2081. As you read, notice ways in which Harrison and the government oppose each other. Follow events to see who prevails.
**Reading Skill**

**Draw Conclusions**

When you **draw conclusions**, you make judgments based on story details and your own prior knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details in Story</th>
<th>My Prior Knowledge</th>
<th>My Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harrison’s father has to wear a radio that blasts loud noises into his ears.</td>
<td>Frequent loud noises make concentration very difficult.</td>
<td>Harrison’s father can’t follow a train of thought for long.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Draw Conclusions

Use the following strategies to draw conclusions about the society depicted in “Harrison Bergeron”:

- Note what results from the society’s practices and laws.
- Apply your own knowledge to speculate about the motives of its officials.
As you read “Harrison Bergeron,” use a chart like the one shown to make notes about the society. Also include your own thoughts or reactions about the information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details About Society</th>
<th>My Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional amendments make everyone equal in every way. ▼</td>
<td>It would be hard to enforce equality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Overall Conclusions
Vonnegut uses the words to the right in relating his futuristic tale. To see how many words you already know, substitute a different word or phrase for each boldfaced term. Write your answers in your *Reader/Writer Notebook*. Sample answers appear in brackets.

1. **vigilance** with the children crossing the street ▼
   [alertness]

2. **wince** in pain after the injection ▼
   [cringe]

3. filled with **consternation** at the thought ▼
   [alarm]
4. **cower** in the corner ▼
   [tremble]

5. **synchronize** our watches ▼
   [coordinate]

6. **neutralizing** the impact ▼
   [reducing the effect of]
consternation  *n.* confused amazement or fear

cower  *v.* to crouch down in fear

neutralize  *v.* to counteract or cancel out the effect of

synchronize  *v.* to match the timing of

vigilance  *n.* alert attention, watchfulness

wince  *v.* to shrink or flinch involuntarily, especially in pain