

Student Names

Allen

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Kurt Vonnegut's Life in Novels

Kurt Vonnegut is one of America's most treasured authors. A survivor of the Bombing of Dresden in World War Two, his writings are heavily influenced by his life. His experiences throughout life are reflected many times in his numerous novels, shown especially in his novels *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Cat's Cradle*. And while his works are a bit strange, people still love his stories.

Looking at Kurt Vonnegut's life, he had quite a few tragic experiences. As stated above, he was present for the firebombing of Dresden in World War Two, which heavily impacted his views on war in general. From that point on in his life, he had a strict anti-war point of view. He was also affected by the Great Depression during his childhood, as his mother worked in a brewery, whose industry kind of came to a screeching halt with Prohibition. Along with German hatred during World War One, due to his mother's German heritage, the Vonnegut family was placed in deep economic and social distress (*Novels For Students* V. 3 259).

However he uses his many tragic experiences as inspiration in his works. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, the main character, Billy Pilgrim, is held as a prisoner of war by the Germans. Eventually, he is held in an abandoned slaughterhouse, until "The air-raid sirens began to howl mournfully" (Vonnegut 164). At this point, the city of Dresden is being firebombed. Pilgrim waits with his fellow POWs in the slaughterhouse. "It wasn't safe to come out of the shelter until noon the next day. When the Americans and their guards did come out, the sky was black with smoke" (Vonnegut 178). His use of life experiences and science fiction elements together create a great novel, that I recommend to any Sci-Fi lover.

His life also influenced another of his well known novels, *Cat's Cradle*. Kurt had to live through his mother's suicide and his father's wasting away because of it. These events led to his views on life. He just sees life as a waste of time. This view is expressed by literally ending his book with the Apocalypse. ("The Futility of Life in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*"). He also uses some of his family member's lives in his books. For example, some of the environments in the book can be related to his brother's laboratory work. Lastly, Hazel, the main character, is a great example of him using his Indiana roots as a character base. Hazel life revolves around her being considered a Hoosier. At any point, she will take in other Indiana natives, and insists they call her "Mom". He does similar things with characters in other books as well.

In conclusion, Vonnegut uses most all of his life experiences in some way in most of his books. He is a master of manipulating his past to fit his story's plot and a fantastic example of an American author.

"Slaughterhouse Five." *Novels For Students*. Ed. Print. Gale Research, 1998. 258-277. Print.

"The Futility of Life in Kurt Vonnegut." *The Futility of Life in Kurt Vonnegut*. Web. 08 May 2014.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1991. Print.