

“Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Questions

1. In 2081, there have been 213 Amendments added to the US Constitution. What does this show us about the government in the story?
2. Find and write down the simile Vonnegut uses when he describes George Bergeron’s thoughts. Then, explain what’s compelling about the use of this particular simile. What can the reader infer from the use of this simile?
3. In this story, equality is highly valued and extreme steps are taken to ensure that no one has an advantage over anyone else. List three ways that a person who is seen as more attractive, intelligent, or athletic might be handicapped by the government.
4. Give two concrete examples from the text showing that, despite the government’s extreme efforts, people still aren’t equal in this society.
5. After the announcer fumbles the bulletin and has to be replaced, Hazel says that he should still be given a raise because “he tried. That’s the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him.” Is Hazel right? Should people be given credit at their workplaces or in school simply for trying, regardless of the result? Give a real-life example from your life, studies, or observations to support your stance.
6. Harrison Bergeron, a genius and stellar athlete, must carry three hundred pounds in “the race of life.” In today’s world, is there a burden that exceptional people must carry? Think about both classmates and famous people as you examine this issue and explain your answer.
7. What does Harrison’s declaration as he frees himself from his shackles show us about power? About liberation?
8. Look at the narrator’s description of Harrison and the ballerina. What simile does the narrator use to describe the couple? How does this simile serve as an element of foreshadowing?
9. Why aren’t Harrison’s parents more emotionally impacted by the death of their son? In what way are some Americans today similar to George and Hazel Bergeron?

10. At the end of the story, what is George's advice to his wife? Is this good advice? Explain your answer.

11. "Harrison Bergeron" was published in 1961 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, and many scholars have suggested that the story should be viewed as a parable. Given the tension in the U.S. during this period of history, what larger point might Kurt Vonnegut Jr. have been trying to make to the reader?