

Discussion Questions for *Slaughterhouse Five*

1. Billy Pilgrim claims to be captured by aliens and to experience time travel. Are we meant to take this notion literally? Is Pilgrim's fate a commentary on the unconnectedness of modern life? Does the subplot of alien abduction diminish the novel in any way?
2. Vonnegut begins the novel with the word "Listen." In chapter six, he begins with the same word. Why does he choose the word listen? Is the word meant to focus our attention? Why doesn't he use the word "look?" Is the word significant because Billy Pilgrim doesn't think people take him seriously? Do the characters in the book listen to one another?
3. Kurt Vonnegut inserts himself into the book in the preface, and again at the end of the novel. Is this another example of a "Chinese box" strategy, and if so, does it work?
4. Several of the writings of Kilgore Trout, the science fiction novelist, seem to come true in *Slaughterhouse Five*. Are we supposed to believe that Kilgore Trout is able to see the future in some way, just as Billy Pilgrim and the Tralfamadorians are able to see the future, or are we meant to think that Trout is a phony?
5. Can a case be made that Billy Pilgrim is a psychotic? Are his time sequences just a manifestation of his inability to order time? Is Billy's inability to stay in one time period a result of his inability to deal with everyday reality after his experiences in the war, or is it some other form of coping mechanism?
6. After times of heightened stress, many people have difficulty coping with everyday events. Is Vonnegut exaggerating this fact in writing about Billy Pilgrim?
7. The Tralfamadorians insist that there is no "why," that things just exist. Billy is always looking for the answer to why? Is Vonnegut making a comment on modern man's inability to find answers to the question of "why" in the novel?