

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level III Honors Award

Dear Mr. Kurt Vonnegut,

I struggle with the concept of death. Whether it was when I was six and my goldfish died, when I was twelve and my grandmother passed away, or even now, when the lives of people, strangers to me, are being taken mercilessly in terrorist attacks and wars. With each transition in my life, from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to young adulthood, the severity of what I noticed death to be increased. My observance of the death around me increased, but my understanding of the intellection continued to plummet. It was not until this past year that I learned of the name for my disconnect with inevitable death: existentialism.

I'm currently a senior at a small high school, in a town no one has ever heard of. I've found myself, primarily in the last two years of high school, worrying more about the life ahead of me than the life I'm currently living. Being a stressed and apprehensive teenager has guided most of my thoughts regarding the future to have something to do with making a name for myself. I don't want to be just another face in the crowd.

I read your novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, this past summer, as I filled out college applications and thought about what I wanted to do with my life. Obviously, this novel attacks a serious issue of war and the effects it has on the soldiers who partake in it, but, while reading it, I was able to make connections with many of the philosophical ideas and statements used to show the asperity of war. I now apply many of the statements made in the book to my everyday thinking. The most simple and most common example of this would be your use of the phrase "so it goes". In the novel, this phrase is used when addressing an instance of death. As I flipped through the pages of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I was immediately intrigued by the amount of times this phrase is used. Its overuse is tied to the fact that death is inevitable, and although not mentioned in the novel, I personally interpreted this phrase as stating not only that death is inevitable, but life as well.

We are all born into this world without consent, and we are all taken out of this world without consent. Now, everything that happens in between, that's up to us, and we need to do what makes us happy. Because eventually, we'll be sitting in a hospital, making dinner at our house, or driving our car down the highway, and everything will just end. We won't compare grade point averages with our classmates anymore. We won't bring our children to school again. We won't worry about our retirement fund. All of the little things we once thought were vital to living, won't be. So it goes.

So in conclusion, thank you, Mr. Vonnegut. Thank you for writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*, for unintentionally changing the way I plan to live the rest of my life, and thank you for including the phrase "so it goes" in the novel 106 times.

Sincerely,

Madelyn

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