

The Satirical Hero's Journey

Directions: A traditional hero leaves the ordinary world, overcomes immense trials, undergoes a transformation, and returns to save society. In *Harrison Bergeron*, Kurt Vonnegut uses heavy sarcasm and irony to completely subvert (ruin/turn upside down) the ancient mythic structure. Complete the organizer below by analyzing how Harrison's journey aligns with traditional archetypes, and how Vonnegut's satirical tone changes the meaning of those moments.

Archetypal Stage & Definition	Harrison's Literal Action	Vonnegut's Sarcastic Subversion
The Ordinary World & Call to Adventure <i>The hero's flawed home environment is introduced, and an event disrupts their life, calling them to a higher purpose.</i>		
Meeting the Mentor <i>A wise figure gives the hero advice, training, or a special tool/weapon to help them succeed on their quest.</i>		
The Supreme Ordeal & Reward <i>The hero faces their greatest challenge, conquers their enemy or obstacle, and achieves ultimate freedom or self-realization.</i>		
The Resurrection & Return with the Elixir <i>The hero faces a final brush with death, survives/sacrifices themselves, and leaves behind a "cure" or lesson that saves society.</i>		

Conclusion Question:

In a traditional myth, the hero's sacrifice successfully heals a broken world. Based on your chart, explain why Harrison's journey forms a **"Broken Loop."** Who is left holding the actual "elixir" (the lesson) at the very end of the story? Cite evidence to compare this text to evidence in your own experience, or other literature, art, or history in your answer.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Educator Answer Key & Facilitation Guide

Use these exemplary student responses to guide grading or to anchor a high-level classroom discussion.

1. The Ordinary World & Call to Adventure

- **Harrison's Literal Action:** Harrison is born an absolute genetic marvel (7 feet tall, highly intelligent, incredibly attractive) in a dystopian 2081 where the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments force everyone to be perfectly equal. At age 14, his "Call to Adventure" is involuntary: he is ripped away from his parents by the government and thrown in jail for being too strong and smart.
- **Vonnegut's Sarcastic Subversion:** Usually, a hero is an underdog who needs to grow stronger. Here, the "Ordinary World" is so intensely broken that the hero is penalized for existing. The narrative introduces Harrison's parents—George and Hazel—with a completely flat, deadpan sarcasm. Their world is a boring, gray living room where watching television completely replaces human connection. Harrison's "heroic call" is treated like a standard bureaucratic arrest.

2. Meeting the Mentor

- **Harrison's Literal Action:** Harrison doesn't get a classic mentor. The closest thing to a guiding force in the story is the government radio transmitter clamped to his father George's ear.
- **Vonnegut's Sarcastic Subversion:** Vonnegut creates an "**Anti-Mentor.**" Instead of a wise figure offering a weapon or tool of empowerment, the government transmits jarring, violent noises (like a 21-gun salute or a siren) directly into the brains of smart people. This forcefully shatters their thoughts. It is a deeply sarcastic inversion: the "guiding voice" is a tool used by the state to intentionally lobotomize its citizens, ensuring that wisdom cannot be passed from generation to generation.

3. The Supreme Ordeal & Reward

- **Harrison's Literal Action:** Harrison storms the television studio, declares himself "Emperor," and rips off his massive handicaps ("like wet packing paper"). He chooses a ballerina to be his Empress, commands the musicians to play beautifully without their handicaps, and leaps into the air to dance, defying gravity.
- **Vonnegut's Sarcastic Subversion:** Vonnegut heavily satirizes Harrison's ego and the "Reward" stage. Instead of claiming a democratic victory for freedom, Harrison immediately acts like an authoritarian tyrant, shouting, "*I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!*" Furthermore, the language describing his dance is absurdly over-the-top and romanticized ("*They reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun*"). Vonnegut elevates this moment to an ridiculous, fairy-tale extreme right before pulling the rug out.

4. The Resurrection & Return with the Elixir

- **Harrison's Literal Action:** Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, walks into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun and shoots Harrison and his Empress dead. Harrison dies mid-air.
- **Vonnegut's Sarcastic Subversion:** Harrison gets no "Resurrection," and his "Elixir" is a total failure inside the story. In a standard epic, the hero's martyrdom inspires a revolution. Here, Vonnegut treats Harrison's death with absolute, freezing indifference. The television tube burns out. George walks back from the kitchen with a beer. Hazel has been crying, but because of her low intelligence, she completely forgets why she is upset. The world resets to baseline normalcy within seconds.

Exemplary Synthesis Answer:

Harrison's journey forms a "Broken Loop" because his sacrifice achieves absolutely nothing within the confines of his society. The world is so deeply controlled, and the citizens' minds are so thoroughly numbed by media and handicaps, that they lack the mental capacity to even process his rebellion. His parents forget his death during a commercial break.

Therefore, the **reader** is the one left holding the actual "elixir." Vonnegut's biting sarcasm is directed at us. By showing a world where a mythic hero is snuffed out like an annoying bug and instantly forgotten, Vonnegut forces the reader to realize that we cannot rely on a single, larger-than-life savior to protect our freedom or individuality. We must protect it ourselves before society degrades into the living room of George and Hazel.