

“Harrison Bergeron” Guided Reading Questions KEY

Directions: As you read “Harrison Bergeron,” answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. In the year 2081, which three amendments to the Constitution ensured equality among all?
211th, 212th, 213th Constitutional amendments

2. Who enforced the amendments?
Agents of the United States Handicapper General

3. How old was Harrison when he was taken away from his parents, George and Hazel?
14 years old

4. Losing their son was a tragedy, but what limited George and Hazel’s ability to think about their son?
Hazel had perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn’t think about anything except in short bursts. George wore a mental handicap radio in his ear that was tuned to a government transmitter. The transmitter would send out a sharp noise every 20 seconds and cause his thoughts to flee.

5. What is Hazel’s opinion of the different sounds George is able to hear through the transmitter? How does Hazel feel about the transmitter?
Hazel is envious of the sounds George is able to hear. She constantly asks for a description of the sounds he hears. Hazel thinks, “It would be real interesting, hearing all the different sounds.”

6. While thinking about Harrison, George hears a sound through his radio transmitter that causes him to tremble. At that moment two of the ballerinas collapse to the floor, holding their temples. What can you infer about the ballerinas based on their actions?
The ballerinas are intelligent. They are also required to wear a mental handicap radio.

7. How does George describe the time when everybody was competing against everybody else?
George describes that time as the dark ages. Everyone was competing with everyone else. The term “dark ages” has a negative connotation, as if the act of competition made it a terrible time to live in.

8. What can you infer about Hazel's self-esteem? Why doesn’t she want people to compete against one another?
Hazel has low self-esteem. She is limited in her ability and she does not want any competition. When George referenced the return of the dark ages, Hazel remarked, “I’d hate it.”

9. What disability did the TV announcer have?
The TV announcer had a speech impediment. He would stutter uncontrollably. The text states that all announcers have a serious speech impediment. This makes one wonder if this is a government-induced handicap.

10. Why did the ballerina, who stood in for the TV announcer, have to apologize for her voice?

Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody which was considered a very unfair voice for a woman to use. In terms of "unfair," her voice is more beautiful than others, thus making her above others with this quality instead of being equal. Therefore, she intentionally changes her voice so it is like everyone else's voice.

11. Why was Harrison Bergeron in jail?

Harrison was plotting to overthrow the government.

12. How is Harrison Bergeron described by the TV announcer?

Harrison is described as a genius, an athlete, under-handicapped, and should be regarded as extremely dangerous.

13. What did the Handicapper General Men require Harrison Bergeron to do to affect his good looks?

Harrison had to wear a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.

14. Explain Harrison Bergeron's statement, "Even as I stand here crippled, hobbled, sickened – I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become!"

Although I am weakened by my handicaps I am still greater than any man who ever lived because I know what I can become without these limitations. Observe the person that I am and observe my ability as I remove my handicaps and be the person that I have the ability to be. (Answers may vary.)

15. Write an objective summary of the short story, "Harrison Bergeron." What message(s) does Vonnegut want the reader to take away from the story?

Answers may vary. Students need to use evidence from the text as they write their summary of the plot of the story. For themes/messages, students need to support their determination of themes/messages using detailed evidence from the text.