

The Price of Sameness: Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut

Fairness and the Amendments

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Grade Level	9th – 10th Grade	**Time Frame**	200
Subject	English/Language Arts, Social Studies	**Duration**	4
Course	American Literature, U.S. Government, U.S. History		

Essential Question

If society enforced total social balance, what would we lose — and would it be worth it?

Summary

In this cross-curricular lesson, students will read and analyze the short story "Harrison Bergeron" by American author Kurt Vonnegut. In the social studies class, students will consider how the amendments to the Constitution promote social balance. They will discuss various claims supporting the amendments and present evidence showing how the amendments affect society. Students will examine the structure of the amendments and draft amendments they hope will improve society for everyone. In the ELA classroom, students will discuss Vonnegut's fictional story, relate it to our current society, and write an extension to the story based on those conversations.

Snapshot

Engage

Students participate in a Four Corners strategy focused on the important statement, "Fairness is more important than freedom."

Explore

Students use the I Notice, I Wonder strategy to examine the U.S. Constitutional Amendments.

Engage 2 (optional)

Students will use I Think/We Think to answer the question, "Is being the same as everyone else a good or bad idea?"

Explain

Students read and highlight the short story "Harrison Bergeron" for words and phrases that support Sounds Like/Looks Like/Feels Like.

Extend

Students consider evidence supporting or opposing the validity of constitutional amendments by

participating in a Claim Cards strategy in small groups.

Evaluate

Students write fair amendments to the Constitution, which contribute to the betterment of society using the CER strategy.

Evaluate 2 (optional)

Students write an original extension to the end of Harrison Bergeron and create a multimodal presentation for their final presentation.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

CLR401: Locate important details in somewhat challenging passages

Oklahoma Academic Standards SOCIAL STUDIES (United States Government)

USG.C.1.3: Examine the founding principles of the American republic.
USG.C.1.3.B: Analyze how the United States government reflects both a democracy and a republic.

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.3.R.5: Students will evaluate textual evidence to determine whether a claim is substantiated or unsubstantiated.

Attachments

- Agree or Disagree—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Agree or Disagree—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Agree or Disagree—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Agree or Disagree—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Claim Cards—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Claim Cards—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Claim Cards—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Claim Cards—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Extension Project—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Extension Project—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Extension Project—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Extension Project—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Four Corners Signs—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Four Corners Signs—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Four Corners Signs—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Four Corners Signs—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Harrison Bergeron—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- Harrison Bergeron—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- Harrison Bergeron—The Price of Sameness.docx
- Harrison Bergeron—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- I Think, We Think—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.docx
- I Think, We Think—The Price of Sameness - Spanish.pdf
- I Think, We Think—The Price of Sameness.docx
- I Think, We Think—The Price of Sameness.pdf
- Lesson Slides—The Price of Sameness.pptx

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Harrison Bergeron handout (attached; one per student)
- U.S. Constitutional Amendments (linked)
- Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments handout (attached; one per student)
- Four Corners Signs handout (attached)
- Claim Cards handout (attached; one set per group)

- Agree or Disagree handout (attached; one per student)
- I Think, We Think handout (attached; optional)
- Extension Project handout (attached; one per student; optional)
- Highlighters
- Markers
- Chart paper
- Sticky notes (two different colors per group)

30 minutes

Preparation

Four Corners Set-up

Use the **Four Corners Signs** attachment to print signs, or to make your own signs, if you prefer. Place signs labeled *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree* around the room prior to class.

Padlet

For the Extend, create a Padlet and share the link/QR code with students for the Video in Padlet activity.

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Cross Curriculum Scaffolding

Teachers of social studies and ELA will benefit from collaborating in planning this cross-curricular lesson. Some may choose to modify the lessons so that the students are not watching/reading the text in both classes, but there is a benefit to repetition, as this topic promotes high levels of critical thinking. If you are not teaching these lessons with a partner teacher, consider incorporating some activities from the other content area into your lesson.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides**.

Show **slide 3** to begin the lesson. Take a moment to read aloud the essential question: "If society enforced total social balance, what would we lose – and would it be worth it?"

Move to **slide 4** and review the lesson objectives.

Show **slide 5.** Watch the short clip entitled "Harrison Bergeron Pre-Reading Video". Stop the video at the 35-second mark. Ask students to discuss their opinions of the concepts of social balance and fairness.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=z0sCJdhW5tU

Show **slide 6.** Share the directions for the instructional strategy, Four Corners**.**

Show **slide 7.** Ask students to consider the statement, "Fairness is more important than freedom."

Explain that *fairness* is defined as "treating people according to their needs, free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism."

Pass out the **Agree or Disagree** handout to each student. Give students a few minutes to form their opinions about the statement and write their answers on the Agree or Disagree handout, then ask them to move to one of the four corners in the room: ***Strongly Agree, Agree***, ***Disagree,*** or ***Strongly Disagree***.

Show **slide 8**. Have groups discuss their opinions about the statement and choose a spokesperson to share their thoughts.

Show **slide 9**. After each representative has spoken, give students who may have changed their opinions an opportunity to switch groups. Ask students who change groups to explain their reasons for changing.

30 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 10**. Explain the instructional strategy, I Notice, I Wonder. Share the U.S. Constitutional Amendments (or pass out the **Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments** handout).

Pass out sticky notes to each group (two different colors for each group).

Instruct students to partner up and discuss their observations regarding the structure of the different amendments. What do they notice? What do they wonder? Remind students to examine the amendments for similarities and/or patterns and include those observations on their sticky notes. Remind students to take a picture of their I Notice, I Wonder or keep their sticky notes for a later activity.

As students share their reflections, consider unhiding **slide 11** to help visually talk about each "notice/wonder" students share.

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

This activity may require that you highlight specific examples, such as the repeated use of negating words like "no" and "not" as well as positive words like "shall" and "shall have."

As a class, discuss the observations students have made. Remind students that they will use what they notice later in the lesson.

Teacher's Note: Film Adaptation Option

Depending on your classroom needs, consider sharing the film *2081*, a video adaptation of the story, "Harrison Bergeron." The film is about 26 minutes long. To play the video, you will need to sign up with an email address, but the film is free to view.

Ask students to identify the types of censorship or violations of human rights they noticed in the video, based on our current amendments to the Constitution.

10 minutes

Engage 2 (optional)

Unhide **slide 12** and introduce the I Think/We Think strategy. Pass out the **I Think, We Think** handout to each student. Have students individually answer the question, “Is being the same as other people good or bad?” in the left column. Then, have the students form groups of three to discuss their answers, writing notes about what the group thinks in the right column. Have students choose a spokesperson and share their answers.

50 minutes

Explain

Show **slide 13.** Introduce the author, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Distribute copies of the short story handout, **Harrison Bergeron,** and highlighters for students.

Show **slide 14.** Have students listen to a portion of the audio version of "Harrison Bergeron."

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=uP_YwwwIScU

The audio version takes 15:38 minutes. About 5–7 minutes into the reading (choose an appropriate stopping place), stop and discuss the current constitutional amendments in relation to the amendments mentioned in the story.

Ask students to discuss the following:

- Define "amendment" based on their prior knowledge.
- Recall the number of amendments we currently have to the Constitution.
- Recall any of the amendments to the Constitution from the previous activity.

Teacher's Note: Definition of Amendment

The definition of an amendment is a change, addition, or rephrasing of something, most often with the intention of improvement. An example of an amendment are the changes made to the U.S. Constitution.

Show **slide 15** with the list of the 27 amendments to the Constitution and brief explanations for each. You can also distribute the attached Current U.S. Constitutional Amendments handout if you have not already. Ask students the following discussion questions:

- Which amendment do you think improved society the most? Why?
- Based on the first paragraph of the story, how many amendments had been added to the Constitution from the present to 2081, the date of the story?

Show **slide 16**. Introduce the instructional strategy, Why-Lighting. Have students highlight instances of unfairness and violations of rights reflected in the print copy of the story. Ask them to write in the margins of the story handout a list of which rights are being taken away and why this is unfair.

Show **slide 17** and ask students to keep in mind the concept of “fairness” as they listen. Remind students that "fairness" means treating people according to their needs, freedom from self-interest or favoritism.

Show **slide 18**. Ask students to continue Why-Lighting as they listen to the story and read along. Continue playing the audiobook version.

When the story has finished, transition to **slide 19** and have a class discussion on the issues of unfairness that are displayed in the story.

- Were the amendments good for the people?
- What basic human rights were being violated to create a "truly uniform" society?

50 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

Remind students that fairness is freedom from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism as we discussed at the beginning of the lesson.

You may print a set of the Claim Cards and pass them out to each group to work at their own pace, or you may choose to use them one at a time to keep the groups working at the same pace. Instruct each group to discuss the evidence that supports or refutes each claim using their own prior knowledge to generate examples and complete informal research during the discussion. Evidence must come from .gov, .edu, or .org sites.

Show **slide 20** and reread the essential question, "If society enforced total social balance, what would we lose — and would it be worth it?"

Show **slide 21** and introduce the instructional strategy Claim Cards.

Have students split up into groups of five (5) and pass out a set of **Claim Cards**. Have each group member select one of the Claim Cards to complete and then discuss with the group. Explain to the students that these claims are based on U.S. Constitutional Amendments.

Show **slide 22** after all student groups have discussed their Claim Cards. Have them create a Video in Padlet that includes a claim statement, a brief explanation of why they believed this claim was the best, and evidence to support this claim.

Have students watch their peers' videos and comment on at least two videos. Comments may be questions or positive observations and remarks.

Teacher's Note: Claim Statements

The claim statements may spark some debate for both sides of the issue. Encourage groups to reach consensus but to be open to allowing them to split into two opposing sides as long as they can provide evidence. Remind students of the rules of respectful debate.

40 minutes

Evaluate

Show **slide 23.** Instruct students to review their sticky note results from earlier in the lesson. Have them share their observations about the structure of the amendments.

Show **slide 24.** Ask students the following question: How can the U.S. Constitution be improved?

As a class, brainstorm some ways the U.S. Constitution should be changed. Have a student from each group write responses on the board or a piece of chart paper. Instruct students to choose a change they consider important and draft an amendment to the Constitution.

Show **slide 25.** Share with students the two available options: (1) write a 28th amendment and a Claim, Evidence, Reasoning paragraph, or (2) create a multimedia presentation. This is an individual project.

Advise students to ensure that the new amendment includes the following:

- It is fair for all people.
- It improves society.
- It includes evidence for the need for and importance of the amendment.

Instruct them to include in the C-E-R paragraph the following:

- A statement of a new amendment.
- Claim about its efficacy.
- Evidence that this amendment is necessary.
- Reasoning explaining how the amendment is fair and how it will help society.

Remind students that these should be similar to the Claim Cards activity they completed previously.

Instruct them to include in the multimedia presentation the following:

- A new amendment
- A sixty-second presentation including pictures, artwork, music, text, or video displaying why the amendment is necessary, how it is fair, and how it will help society.

Move to **slide 26**. Students will now get into groups of four to share their new amendment CER OR multimedia presentation. The students should choose their favorite presentation through a silent vote, and the chosen presentations will be presented to the whole class.

95 minutes

Evaluate 2 (optional)

Move to **slide 27** and unhide. Pass out the **Extension Project** handout to every student. As they go through each step, students will individually write an extension to the story and create a multimedia presentation.

Unhide **slide 28**. Students will then get into groups of four to share their story extension OR multimedia presentation. The students will choose their favorite presentation through a silent vote, and the chosen presentations will be presented to the whole class.

Resources

- Anthropic. (2026). *Claude* (Claude Sonnet 4) [Large language model]. https://claude.com/product/overview
- CommonLit, Inc. (2018, Mar. 23). Harrison Bergeron pre-reading video. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0sCJdhW5tU
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- K20 Center. (n.d). Claim cards. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/160
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). I think / we think. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/141
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- Vonnegut, K. (1961). Harrison Bergeron. CommonLit. https://www.commonlit.org/texts/harrison-bergeron
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