

Unit 13 - Harrison Bergeron

13A Introduction

The year was 2081, and everyone was finally equal. That is the first line in a short story by Kurt Vonnegut called "Harrison Bergeron." First published in 1961, the story asks an important question: Do we really want to create a society where everyone is equal? What would the government have to do in order to make everyone truly equal?

13B Song Lyrics

I used to have a **flair** for writing rhymes,
 A natural talent for crafting lines.
 But then they issued a **decree** to the people,
 An order that stated we were all equal.
 All across the nation we gave it an **ovation**,
 We stood up and clapped, till they noticed that
 Not everyone could stand up and clap like us,
 So they weighed us down and kept us handcuffed.

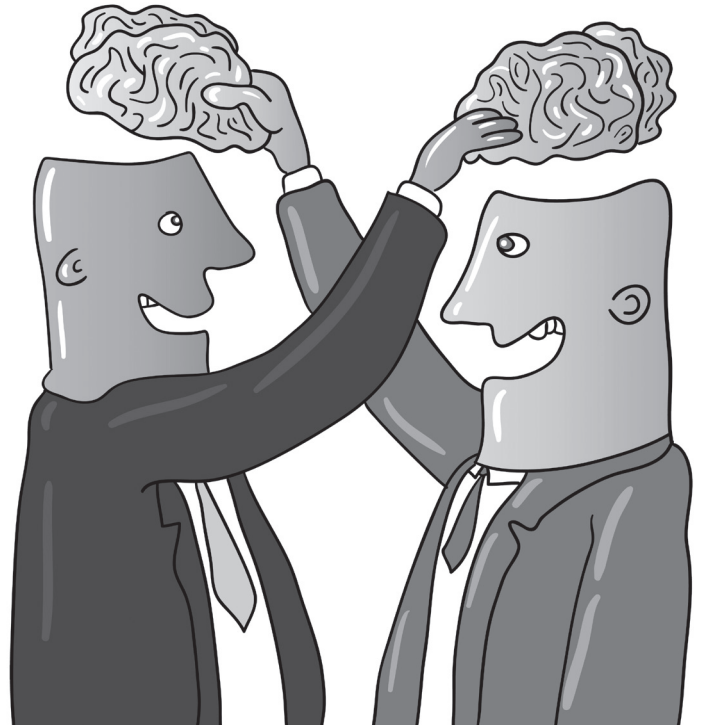
The weights were a **hindrance** to our movements,
 They held us back, so we're equal now.
 They **instituted** and set up new rules that
 Made pretty kids ugly, and skinny guys fat.
 Then they took away and **confiscated**
 The books; it was not debated.
 So that we'd remember, they built a statue that
Commemorated the day we became the same.

*Are you close or **aloof** to the daily news?
 Do you know what society is doing to you?
 Do you know about the wars we wage, the rise of AIDS,
 The price we pay to make our lives this way?
 x2*

This girl Holly probably was a **prodigy**,
 So smart she won nine weeks straight on Jeopardy.
 I called up the cops, I was feeling jealous,
 I said we need to make Holly the same as the others.
 It's necessary and **imperative**,
 Right now she's the brightest girl that ever lived.
 She's not my relative, you better give her a **sedative**,
 Some medicine to calm her down, that'll settle it.

I used to be a dedicated and **avid** runner,
 They put a chain around my leg and added another.
 They made me stop and **desist**, the cops came quick,
 They had to make sure that I run with a limp.
 Now I'm clumsy and **ungainly**,
 And you'll get two years in prison if you unchain me.
 They **encroached** upon our rights, took them gradually,
 Is this how equality has to be?

Hook x3



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13C Words Defined

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

Below you'll find each vocabulary word that was used in the song. Each word is followed by the part of speech, a simple definition and a meaningful sentence. Some words will also have synonyms, antonyms and other forms of the word listed.

1. **aloof** (adj) uninterested or distant

Henry was so *aloof* that he didn't realize that the actor he had idolized for five years was standing right next to him.

Synonyms: detached, distant, disdainful

Other forms: You can also use *aloof* as an adverb: He stood *aloof*.

2. **avid** (adj) enthusiastic and eager

Melissa was an *avid* bicyclist and sometimes rode over thirty miles a day.

Synonyms: devoted, ardent, voracious

3. **commemorate** (verb) to honor the memory of

We will *commemorate* the victims of September eleventh with a statue.

Synonyms: to memorialize, pay tribute, to revere

4. **confiscate** (verb) to use authority to take possession of private property

At the airport, the security agents will *confiscate* any items that could be used as a weapon.

Synonyms: seize, commandeer

5. **decree** (noun) an authoritative order or decision

The presidential *decree* to release the prisoners was on the President's desk, waiting to be signed.

Synonyms: an act, mandate

Other forms: *Decree* is also a verb meaning "to command or to issue," as in: I *decree* that all students who wear hats in the classroom will receive a detention.

6. **desist** (verb) to stop doing something

I know you love to yell, but you better *desist* when the teacher comes back.

Synonyms: cease

7. **encroach** (verb) to advance beyond usual limits

Sometimes I feel like my twin sister tries to *encroach* on my side of the bedroom with all of her belongings.

Synonyms: to invade, overstep, trespass

8. **flair** (noun) a natural talent or ability; style

James had a *flair* for taking photos and arranging them attractively in scrapbooks.

Synonyms: gift, talent, aptness

Antonyms: inability, limitation

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9. hindrance (noun) something that holds you back

The baseball player's newly broken arm was a *hindrance* to him pitching in any more games for the remainder of the season.

Synonyms: encumbrance, obstacle, restraint

Other forms: A *hindrance* *hinders* (verb) you.

10. imperative (adj) necessary, required, critical

It is *imperative* to study for your driver's test to ensure that you pass.

Other forms: Imperative is also a noun meaning "a command," as in: The lieutenant gave an *imperative* for all the soldiers to drop and complete fifty push-ups.

11. institute (verb) to establish or begin

The school administration is going to *institute* many new rules because of the increase in misbehavior among the student body.

Other forms: Something established is an *institution* (noun), while an *institute* (noun) is "an organization for the promotion of a specific cause".

12. ovation (noun) loud, prolonged applause

Mr. Costello received a standing *ovation* after he was recognized for saving three children from drowning.

Synonyms: acclaim, applause

13. prodigy (noun) a child with an extraordinary talent or ability

Steven was considered a musical *prodigy* at the age of four because he could play Mozart from memory.

Synonyms: child genius, phenomenon

14. sedative (adj) calming or soothing

The *sedative* music helped to calm the crying baby

Other forms: A *sedative* (noun) "a soothing medication," will *sedate* (verb) or calm a person.

15. ungainly (adj) awkward, clumsy

Frank was so *ungainly* that he tripped over everything all the time.

Synonyms: blundering, uncoordinated, klutzy

Antonyms: graceful, skillful, coordinated

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13D Fix the Mistake

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

Each of the sentences below has a mistake. The wrong vocabulary words have been used, so the sentences don't make sense. Rewrite each sentence using the correct vocabulary word from this unit.

1. After he hit his third home run of the game, the crowd gave him a standing **sedative**.

2. In honor of the earthquake survivors, each one will get a plaque to **institute** their bravery.

3. The honors students are such **aloof** readers that they've read every book in the classroom library.

4. Her cell phone rang so much during the movie that the usher had to **encroach** it.

5. The committee wrote up a(n) **hindrance** that made the beautiful parkland safe from future construction.

6. It is rare to see a(n) **imperative** model on the fashion runway: They rarely trip.

7. Janine had such a strong **prodigy** for baking cakes that the local bakery hired her at the age of sixteen.

8. We had to **confiscate** from hitchhiking following the serial killings.

9. Having crutches was such a big **decree** to getting up and down the stairs.

10. Fred was so **ungainly** that he didn't remove his hat during the national anthem at the ball game, even when everyone around him was doing it.

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11. Most of our family thinks my brother is a musical **ovation** because he can play six different instruments at the age of four.
- _____
12. The principal **commemorated** a strange new rule that girls could not wear skirts to school on Tuesdays.
- _____
13. I begged the doctor to prescribe some kind of **flair** for my grandmother's increasing anxiety.
- _____
14. It was **avid** that the couple was not late for their dinner reservation, because they'd lose it.
- _____
15. So many new housing communities are starting to **desist** on the natural habitat of black bears.
- _____

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13E Pick the Winner

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

Circle the word that best fits into the sentence. Then write a sentence below that uses the word you didn't pick in a meaningful way.

1. Every night when the tide comes in, I feel like the ocean is **(encroaching OR confiscating)** on my waterfront property.

2. Einstein was most likely a mathematical **(prodigy OR hindrance)** for his time.

3. There were so many teenagers in the house that their dad **(commemorated OR instituted)** a five-minute time limit on the phone.

4. Ben had a **(flair OR decree)** for taking care of injured animals.

5. The applause was so loud from the **(ovation OR sedative)** that the baby started to cry.

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13F Draw the Relationships

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

In each grouping of eight words below, draw straight lines between the synonyms (words that mean similar things) and squiggly lines between any antonyms (words that mean nearly opposite things). Every word should have at least one line connected to it. Some may have more.

1

avid	pronouncement	memorialize	enthusiastic
commemorate	confiscate	decree	seize

2

desist	encroach	natural talent	hindrance
trespass	stop	flair	obstacle

3

child genius	institute	imperative	prodigy
optional	begin	ovation	boos

4

sedative	ungainly	graceful	calming
aloof	eager	avid	detached

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13G Understanding What You Read

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

Read the passage below. Then answer the questions.

The crowd of teenagers and parents in the hotel conference room gave the speaker a standing ovation. The speaker, a man who had spent the last eleven years playing professional basketball, had given an inspiring speech on the importance of hard work. He had talked about how staying in school was imperative to his success. He had discussed how crucial it was for people with money to give back to those in need.

Mike stood in the crowd, not believing he was in the same room as his hero, Stephon Marbury. He had studied Marbury's success, from his days as a young basketball prodigy from Coney Island, through his college career at Georgia Tech and on to the pros. Mike had always been inspired by the way Marbury had never allowed his setbacks in school be a hindrance to his goal of playing in the NBA. Even though some people downplayed it, Mike loved the way his hero played with real flair - sometimes flashy, sometimes quick, but always entertaining. Mike would often argue about Marbury's playing ability with people, and would usually win because he had all of Marbury's stats memorized.

Most interesting was Marbury's new venture. He had started a line of footwear. On the surface, there didn't seem to be anything weird about that: Lots of NBA players had sneaker deals with Nike, Reebok, and Adidas. But Marbury told the crowd what made his shoes different: They were priced at \$14.98 a pair. Someone in the audience asked if they were "cheap shoes that would fall apart." Marbury turned to the kid and said, "I'll be wearing a pair of the shoes every game I play in the NBA. If they can hold up on the court, they can hold up in a high school."

Mike told his father he'd be right back and went to the bathroom. As he washed his hands, he turned toward the door; with so much on his mind, he was kind of aloof. He didn't realize a tall man had entered the bathroom until they nearly collided. Mike lifted his head and murmured, "Excuse me, sir."

Only when the voice fell down upon him did Mike realize who he'd run into. "That's alright, little man."

"Oh, wow," Mike stammered. "I'm an avid fan." He stammered out a few more sentences before walking out the door to where his father waited.

"Pops, guess what!"

1. Which character's actions does the narrator follow most carefully?

- (A) Stephon Marbury's
- (B) Mike's
- (C) Mike's pop's
- (D) the hotel staff

2. According to the passage, the difference between Marbury's line of shoes and most others is that they

- (A) are less popular than other shoes
- (B) are more affordable
- (C) look cooler
- (D) will fall apart faster

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3. Why does Mike act aloof in the bathroom?

- (A) He's distracted.
- (B) He's upset.
- (C) He's amazed that Marbury would single him out.
- (D) He wants a pair of those special shoes.

4. When the narrator notes that Stephon Marbury plays with "flair," it means that

- (A) he has limitations
- (B) he has a natural ability
- (C) he plays in special sneakers
- (D) his hair is on fire

5. In the passage, Stephon Marbury tells the crowd that people who are fortunate

- (A) should invest wisely
- (B) should create a line of affordable shoes and clothes
- (C) should spend time with those they love
- (D) should give money back to the poor

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13H Thinking Creatively

aloof / avid / commemorate / confiscate / decree / desist / encroach / flair / hindrance / imperative / institute / ovation / prodigy / sedative / ungainly

Answer each question below. Don't be afraid to think creatively.

1. How does the government **encroach** upon your rights?

2. What person would you **commemorate** with a holiday?

3. What is **imperative** for every person to do?

4. What type of show would be called *America's Most Aloof People* be?

5. Would you rather be normal, or an **ungainly prodigy**? Why?

Word Breakdown

Aloof is a word that comes to us from sailors. The *a* in *aloof* is from Old English and means “on,” “in,” or “toward” (think *aside*, *away* or *ashore*). The *loof* is Middle English for “windward position,” which is what a boat wants – to have the wind at a good angle. If a ship were sailing near rocks, a sea captain might give out an order to keep the boat *aloof*, meaning keep it sailing toward the wind, which would prevent the wind from sending it to the rocks. Thus, *aloof* came to mean “at a distance.” Now the word is often used to mean “out of it.” If someone says our President is aloof, it’s not a compliment.