

Name: _____

Miss Crossley

__ LA Period: _____

Date: _____

"I Am Very Real"

Directions: Read the following article and complete the SOAPSTONE Analysis strategy. Then, read the poem "Burning a Book" and complete the TP-CASTT Poetry Analysis strategy.

I am very real

In October of 1973, Bruce Severy — a 26-year-old English teacher at Drake High School, North Dakota — decided to use Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as a teaching aid in his classroom. The next month, on November 7th, the head of the school board, Charles McCarthy, demanded that all 32 copies be burned in the school's furnace as a result of its "obscene language." Other books soon met with the same fate.

On the 16th of November, Kurt Vonnegut sent McCarthy the following letter. He didn't receive a reply.

(Source: The Letters of Note book, courtesy of The Estate of Kurt Vonnegut.)

November 16, 1973

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

I am writing to you in your capacity as chairman of the Drake School Board. I am among those American writers whose books have been destroyed in the now famous furnace of your school.

Certain members of your community have suggested that my work is evil. This is extraordinarily insulting to me. The news from Drake indicates to me that books and writers are very unreal to you people. I am writing this letter to let you know how real I am.

I want you to know, too, that my publisher and I have done absolutely nothing to exploit the disgusting news from Drake. We are not clapping each other on the back, crowing about all the books we will sell because of the news. We have declined to go on television, have written no fiery letters to editorial pages, have granted no lengthy interviews. We are angered and sickened and saddened. And no copies of this letter have been sent to anybody else. You now hold the only copy in your hands. It is a strictly private letter from me to the people of Drake, who have done so much to damage my reputation in the eyes of their children and then in the eyes of the world. Do you have the courage and ordinary decency to show this letter to the people, or will it, too, be consigned to the fires of your furnace?

I gather from what I read in the papers and hear on television that you imagine me, and some other writers, too, as being sort of ratlike people who enjoy making money from poisoning the minds of young people. I am in fact a large, strong person, fifty-one years old, who did a lot of farm work as a boy, who is good with tools. I have raised six children, three my own and three adopted. They have all turned out well.

Two of them are farmers. I am a combat infantry veteran from World War II, and hold a Purple Heart. I have earned whatever I own by hard work. I have never been arrested or sued for anything. I am so much trusted with young people and by young people that I have served on the faculties of the University of Iowa, Harvard, and the City College of New York. Every year I receive at least a dozen invitations to be commencement speaker at colleges and high schools. My books are probably more widely used in schools than those of any other living American fiction writer.

If you were to bother to read my books, to behave as educated persons would, you would learn that they are not sexy, and do not argue in favor of wildness of any kind. They beg that people be kinder and more responsible than they often are. It is true that some of the characters speak coarsely. That is because people speak coarsely in real life. Especially soldiers and hardworking men speak coarsely, and even our most sheltered children know that. And we all know, too, that those words really don't damage children much. They didn't damage us when we were young. It was evil deeds and lying that hurt us.

After I have said all this, I am sure you are still ready to respond, in effect, "Yes, yes—but it still remains our right and our responsibility to decide what books our children are going to be made to read in our community." This is surely so. But it is also true that if you exercise that right and fulfill that responsibility in an ignorant, harsh, un-American manner, then people are entitled to call you bad citizens and fools. Even your own children are entitled to call you that.

I read in the newspaper that your community is mystified by the outcry from all over the country about what you have done. Well, you have discovered that Drake is a part of American civilization, and your fellow Americans can't stand it that you have behaved in such an uncivilized way. Perhaps you will learn from this that books are sacred to free men for very good reasons, and that wars have been fought against nations which hate books and burn them. If you are an American, you must allow all ideas to circulate freely in your community, not merely your own.

If you and your board are now determined to show that you in fact have wisdom and maturity when you exercise your powers over the education of your young, then you should acknowledge that it was a rotten lesson you taught young people in a free society when you denounced and then burned books—books you hadn't even read. You should also resolve to expose your children to all sorts of opinions and information, in order that they will be better equipped to make decisions and to survive.

Again: you have insulted me, and I am a good citizen, and I am very real.

Kurt Vonnegut

SOAPSTone Graphic Organizer

Title of Piece:	
Author:	
SOAPSTone Components:	Response (Include Text Support)
<u>S</u> ubject	<p>The general topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the title • What is the text mainly about? • Summarize key events/details here...
<u>O</u> ccasion	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time and place of the piece • What is the historical context? • What's the genre? (speech, poem, sermon...)
<u>A</u> udience	<p>WHO is it for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is hearing or reading or seeing the text? • Is it one person, a small group, or a large group? • What qualities, beliefs, or values might the audience members have in common?
<u>P</u> urpose	<p>So WHAT?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHY is the author presenting these ideas? • What does he or she want the audience to do, feel, say, or choose?
<u>S</u> peaker	<p>WHO is speaking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose voice tells the story? • What do we know about the writer's life and views that shapes this text?
<u>T</u> one	<p>Emotional Mood or Effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What emotions describe the attitude of the speaker? • Which words or details let you know? • Which persuasive techniques or appeals are used to enhance the tone or mood? <p>Examples: angry, threatening, light-hearted, cheerful...</p>

"Burning a Book," by William Stafford

Protecting each other, right in the center
a few pages glow a long time.

The cover goes first, then outer leaves
curling away, then spine and a scattering.
Truth, brittle and faint, burns easily,
its fire as hot as the fire lies make---
flame doesn't care. You can usually find
a few charred words in the ashes.

And some books ought to burn, trying
for character
but just faking it. More disturbing
than book ashes are whole libraries that
no one
got around to writing----desolate
towns, miles of unthought in cities,
and the terrorized countryside where
wild dogs
own anything that moves. If a book
isn't written, no one needs to burn it----
ignorance can dance in the absence of fire.

So I've burned books. And there are many
I haven't even written, and nobody has.

(1987)

TP-CASTT Poetry Analysis

TITLE: Consider the title and make a prediction about what the poem is about.

PARAPHRASE: Translate the poem line by line into your own words on a literal level. Look for complete thoughts (sentences may be inverted) and look up unfamiliar words.

CONNOTATION: Examine the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Look for figurative language, imagery, and sound elements.

ATTITUDE/TONE: Notice the speaker's tone and attitude. Humor? Sarcasm? Awe?

SHIFTS: Note any shifts or changes in speaker or attitude. Look for key words, time change, punctuation.

TITLE: Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

THEME: Briefly state in your own words what the poem is about (subject), then what the poet is saying about the subject (theme).