

## **Title:** Kurt Vonnegut's Rollercoaster Ride

### **Synopsis:**

In a charming, chalk-dusted video, Kurt Vonnegut – war survivor, sci-fi legend, and certified smartass – declares that all stories follow shapes. Not themes. Not genres. Shapes. Using a simple X-Y axis (Time vs. Fortune), Vonnegut draws out the emotional trajectories of stories – from the fairy tale swoop of Cinderella to the bleak flatline of *The Metamorphosis*. The resulting theory is part comic lecture, part existential truth bomb, and 100% brilliant.

The Vonnegut classroom video: [here](#)

The Snark's Blog: [here](#)

### **Discussion Questions**

*Use these questions to spark conversation and reflection in the classroom:*

- Why does Vonnegut reduce complex stories to such simple visual arcs? Does that diminish storytelling – or clarify it?
- What makes Cinderella's story shape so satisfying? Is it the upward swing – or the tension created by the downswings?
- Vonnegut jokes that Kafka's story has no happy arc – just a flatline into darkness. Why do we still find that compelling?
- How might the "shape" of a story differ depending on whose perspective you follow?
- Can you think of a book, film, or play that deliberately breaks this idea of shape? Does it work?

### **Writer's Prompts**

*Creative exercises to help students apply the themes of the topic:*

- **Prompt 1:** Shape Swap. Take a well-known fairy tale or myth and invert its shape.
- **Prompt 2:** Shape Before Plot. Draw a shape first, then invent a story to fit it.
- **Prompt 3:** One Day, One Shape: Write a single day in someone's life with the Cinderella arc.
- **Prompt 4:** Kafka Revisited: Write a story with no improvement – just emotional gravity.
- **Prompt 5:** Multi-Character Plot Mapping: One character rising, one falling – same story, events.
- **Prompt 6:** The Lie of the Upward Arc: A story that seems to rise, but ends with a twist.

### **Class Activities**

*These activities will help expand on the themes of the topic:*

- Graph That Story: Plot a story on Vonnegut's graph as a group exercise.
- Dramatic Read & Redraw: Rewrite Cinderella or The Metamorphosis with a different shape.
- Shape Guessing Game: Guess a story shape based on its synopsis.
- Collaborative Shape Story: Groups create a story from a given shape

**Closing note from the blog's writer, The Snark**

*Vonnegut may have doodled on a blackboard, but what he gave us was narrative gold. Shapes are simple, yes – but simplicity isn't stupidity. It's clarity. If your story can't be plotted with even a vague squiggle on the graph of fortune over time, you might not have a story. You might have a mood board.*

*So go ahead – draw the line. Trace the rise, the fall, the weird spiral into bug-dom. Because stories, like lives, are better when you can feel the shift in the air... and know something's about to change*