Case 4

Gilbert Trout had to write a book report for an English class. He chose the book *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. to review. After handing in his initial draft of the paper the following passage was included:

The element of time in *Slaughterhouse* is difficult to deal with. Billy Pilgrim’s dream sequences act as flashbacks with him jumping from his days as a prisoner of war during World War II to his abduction by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. At times it is difficult to know when he is awake and when he is asleep.

Gilbert’s uncle has taught English Literature at Harvard for 20 years and specializes in twentieth century American fiction. He advises Gilbert that Billy Pilgrim is not dreaming at any point in the novel but “time-tripping” from one event in his life to another. He suggests to Gilbert that the structure of time itself is altered in Billy’s world and that Billy is bouncing from one event to another as though time were a circle instead of a straight line.

After this discussion with his uncle, Gilbert hands in the final version of his report. The passage presented above is changed to the following:

The element of time in *Slaughterhouse* is difficult to deal with. While the superficial reader may interpret the book as a series of flashbacks, Billy Pilgrim actually jumps from his days as a prisoner of war during World War II to his abduction by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. It is as though time itself has been transformed from the normal chronology of a straight line to a circle where Billy literally jumps or “time-trips” from one point on the perimeter to another.

Gilbert’s instructor suspects he has plagiarized and does not accept his report. Instead the instructor offers to allow Gilbert to write another report on a different book or receive an F on the report.

Was Gilbert treated fairly? Did he plagiarize? Was he wrong to seek assistance from his uncle? Be prepared to report your findings to the class.