

About the Author: Ambrose Bierce spent an unhappy childhood in Ohio and left home as a bitter and pessimistic young man. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Bierce joined the Union Army; he later brought his military experience vividly to life in some of his best stories. After divorcing his wife in 1891 and losing one son in a gunfight and the other to alcoholism, Bierce disappeared in Mexico in 1913, where legend says he was killed in the Mexican Revolution.

After seeing the first part of the video for “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” what do you think this story is about? What do you think will happen to the man who is not in a military uniform? Infer how the man is feeling as he stands there on the bridge.

You will need to identify as we read this short story what is the point of view. There are five different types of point of view, and you are responsible for identifying, defining, and being able to write in these five different styles: objective, third person, first person, omniscient, and limited omniscient.

Objective---tells what happens without stating more than can be inferred from the story’s action and dialogue. The narrator never discloses anything about what the characters think or feel, remaining a detached observer.

Third Person---here the narrator, lets us know exactly how the characters feel.

First Person---in the first person point of view, the narrator does participate in the action of the story.

Omniscient---a narrator who knows everything about all the characters, is all knowing.

Limited Omniscient--a narrator whose knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor.

Students will need to identify and understand the following literary devices: foreshadowing, imagery, setting, conflict, internal conflict, and external conflict.

Imagery--the way a writer uses words to describe a place or an event. These words “paint a picture” in the reader’s mind. They can also appeal to one’s five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

Foreshadowing---the clues that a writer gives the reader that prepares the reader for the event that come later in the story.

Setting---the time and place in which the events of a story occur.

Conflict---the struggle between opposing forces in a story.

Internal Conflict---conflict that exists in the mind of a character.

External Conflict---conflict that exists when a character deals with an outside force, such as another person, nature, society, or fate.

Looking at the first paragraph of the short story, what is the setting of the story and describe the imagery used in this paragraph.

Directions: Read the story completely once before annotating it for your thesis. Use the questions below to help guide you through the reading as many of the questions will be on the test.

1. The man on the bridge remains anonymous until the second part of the story, yet he is described in great detail---even his thoughts. Why?

By describing the anonymous man in great detail and even his thoughts, we, the readers, become invested in this character. The author sucks us into the piece, and we, the readers feel that we understand the character better.

2. What is the significance of the sergeant being a deputy sheriff in civil life?

Whether a sergeant or a deputy in civil life, this man understands the significance of his post and consequences of breaking the law.

3. What point is Bierce making by the sentinels' indifference to the action at the center of the bridge and that they "might have been statues to adorn the bridge"?

The sentinels' indifference to the action at the center of the bridge demonstrates that these men are not moved by a man being hanged as they have seen death. They are on the bridge not so much as to witness and take interest, but it is part of their duty to stand and be present.

4. What comment on military formalities is Bierce conveying in the following: "Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced he is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those familiar with him."?

This questions ties in nicely with three. With the death of this man, there are certain duties that must be performed such as sentinels on the bridge present when Death, Himself, takes the man.

5. "Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded." What does this tell us about Bierce's view of the military?

Bierce understands that military is not prejudice...it does not matter what your skin color, age, occupation, or wealth...no one is excluded from a hanging if you are on the opposition.

6. Explain the imagery of the sluggish stream and the dancing driftwood.

The imagery of the sluggish stream demonstrates the beginning of Farquhar's attempt to manipulate the nature of time to a standstill, so that in that moment, he can live a different life which is filled with life and happiness like the dancing driftwood. The story's structure, which moves from the present to the past to what is revealed to be the imagined present reflects this fluidity as well as the tension that exists among competing notions of time.

7. What is the significance of the man's perception of his ticking watch?

As the ticking of his watch slows and more time elapses between the strokes, Farquhar drifts into a timeless realm. When Farquhar imagines himself slipping into the water, Bierce compares him to a "vast pendulum," immaterial and spinning wildly out of control. Here Farquhar drifts into a transitional space that is neither life nor death but a disembodied consciousness in a world with its own rules. In the brief window of time between the officer stepping off the plank and Farquhar's actual death, time slows and alters to accommodate a comforting vision of Farquhar's safe return to his family. Despite Farquhar's manipulation of time, however, he cannot escape reality. Whether he lives a few moments or days longer, death ultimately claims him. Attempting to bend time to his own will is for naught.

8. In section II Bierce finally introduces Farquhar. Why does he place the detailed description of Farquhar in the middle of the action as Farquhar falls between the ties? How does this contribute to the suspense?

In the middle section, Farquhar's devotion to the "great cause" of the Confederates is described; however, this devotion greatly changes. Farquhar's transformation from an idealistic military dreamer to a man desperate to escape the horror of death is typical of the transformation most Civil War soldiers went through after their first battle. Farquhar allows his desperation to take control of his sensations; his desire to live is so powerful that his mind concocts an illusion of escape that feels real. We, the readers, feel sympathetic towards him, and we also do not know that he is truly dead, and his "escape" adds to the suspense.

9. Why is it significant that, "circumstances of an imperious nature, which is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army...and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction." Look up the word "imperious" and note the multiple meanings. Do you think Bierce had a specific reason for this particular word choice? If so, why?

imperious: adjective: 1. domineering in a haughty manner; dictatorial; overbearing; 2. urgent; imperative. If Bierce used imperious to describe Farquhar's circumstances of why he could not join the Army were more important or haughty, then Farquhar is not as likable; however, if Bierce used imperious to describe Farquhar's circumstances of why

he could not join the Army were of a urgent and imperative nature, then Farquhar is more likable.

10. Why was Farquhar captured? Why did the Federal scout lie?

Farquhar was captured for trying to destroy the bridge, and the Federal scout lied to see if he was against the Union Army.

11. As the reader, when do you begin to sympathize with Farquhar--before or after his introduction in section II? Why?

12. Discuss the meaning: "...encompassed in a luminous cloud of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance..."

This is a metaphor because it compares Farquhar's role/placement in the cloud to a fiery heart. He's dizzy and described it by saying vast pendulum which is a metaphor also.

13. Discuss the meaning of the "disobedient hands."

Farquhar has hands that are not functioning---perhaps he is dead already, or his hands are tied and have lost feeling.

14. Why does Bierce compare the sounds of the insects to audible music?

Aside from the fact that we know this is a hallucination that occurred in a millisecond, the perceptions of one who are about to die are heightened.

15. Discuss the significance: "...in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly around, himself the pivotal point,...." The movements of the men on the bridge, "were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic."

As personification of military justice, the captain and the soldiers are monumental and forbidding. The soldiers stand impassive at Farquhar's hanging and when Farquhar escapes, they act only as machines of destruction shooting their guns and firing cannons in his directions.

16. How does Farquhar's ability to see the gray eye of the marksman on the bridge contribute to the meaning of the story?

17. What is the significance of Farquhar's ability to escape the gunfire?

18. Why does Farquhar perceive the sand as diamonds, rubies, and emeralds?

19. "A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Aeolian harps"--the enchanting spot. To what is Bierce alluding?

The narrator alludes to Aeolus, the gods of the winds in Greek mythology.

20. What is the meaning of Farquhar' falling asleep while walking?
21. Elaborate on the meaning of the imagery in the description of his home: gates, bright and beautiful, wide white walk -- and his wife: looking fresh and cool, a smile of ineffable joy, attitude of matchless grace and dignity.
22. "Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective." What does this reveal?
23. Sum up the methods Bierce uses to build suspense.

Bierce uses foreshadowing to build suspense; for example, he looked a moment at his "steadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move, what a sluggish stream!-- This selection is an example of foreshadowing because it shows how much Farquhar is attempting to slow time down for himself, and appreciate the last minute or two of his life, demonstrating that something spontaneous and exciting is about to happen, thus building suspense for the reader. Furthermore, when he unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him he says, "If I could free my hands. I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. I consider this passage an example of foreshadowing because it is building up tension and suspense, showing what he COULD do if he had the chance, causing the reader to infer that this is a possibility. Also, the climax of the piece builds suspense. Because all suspense and past events have led to the climax, his brain creates the illusion that he escapes and is about to reunite with his wife, when all of a sudden, the truth is revealed.

24. After analyzing this story, explain Bierce's views of war and the military. How does he feel about it? Support your response with examples from the text.

"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" Literary Analysis

Directions: Compose a literary analysis over 1 1/2 pages in length in MLA format on one of the following prompts.

Prompt 1: Compose a well-written essay analyzing how Bierce thematically conveys his view of the military and war in his short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Be

sure to determine and articulate Bierce's view and then analyze how Bierce uses literary techniques to develop this theme. Support your responses with examples from the text.

Prompt 2: Compose a well-written essay analyzing the literary techniques Bierce employs to create and maintain suspense in his short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." You may want to consider imagery, arrangement, characterization, as well as plot elements. Support your responses with examples from the text.

Prompt 3: Even though upon first reading the conclusion of Bierce's story comes as a shock, after close reading, readers discover that Bierce foreshadows the ending through a variety of literary techniques including imagery, preternatural plot elements, allusion, etc. Compose a well-written essay analyzing the techniques Bierce implements that contribute to foreshadowing the ending. Support your responses with examples from the text.

Requirements and Due Dates: Your rough draft is due _____. Your final draft is due on _____.

Remember the rules of successful academic writing:

- * Your response must completely address all elements of the prompt.
- * You must write in formal academic voice. Do not address the reader by using second person point of view (you) or by asking rhetorical questions. Do not use first person ("I").
- * Literature is alive, so use literary present tense.
- * You must have a focused thesis statement and use the thesis formula.
- * Incorporate quotes into your own sentences; do not use quotes as topic sentences
- * You must have a strong opening paragraph with a topic sentence and fully developed body paragraphs.
- * Do not refer to your own paper with statements like, "This essay is going to be about..."
- * Each body paragraph must relate to your thesis; you should make connections and avoid digressions. Your body paragraphs should be at least four sentences in length.
- * * Remember: follow your topic sentence with a concrete detail and two or more sentences commenting on the relevance or elaborating on the significance.
- * Use effective transitions.
- * Avoid over-summarizing; use plot elements primarily to support your points.
- * Avoid passive ("to be") verbs. Use strong verbs.
- * In your conclusion, reassert your thesis and discuss the significance of your essay.