

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?
2. What is the significance of the sergeant being a deputy sheriff in civil life?
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"?
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."?
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?
6. Explain the imagery of the sluggish stream and the dancing driftwood.
7. What is the significance of the man's perception of his ticking watch?
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?

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?
10. Why was Farquhar captured? Why did the Federal scout lie?
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...”
13. Discuss the meaning of the “disobedient hands.”
14. Why does Bierce compare the sounds of the insects to audible music?
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.”
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?
20. What is the meaning of Farquhar's 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.
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 right 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.