

Discussion Questions for “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”

Choose three of the eleven questions below and answer each completely using formal academic diction, and set up and cited text as appropriate. Do this on a google doc that you share with me before class on January 16, 2020

1. Author Ambrose Bierce actually saw combat during the Civil War. He served in the Ninth Regiment, Indiana Volunteers. What evidence can you provide that "he knows what he is talking about" in his telling of the story? Do you detect any bias in his writing, does his favor the Union over the Confederates, or is he seemingly impartial?
2. How does Bierce's methodical writing style of providing detailed descriptions in a quiet, slow, suspenseful manner affect the reader? Provide examples (like how he describes the rifles in "support" position, or the sound of his own watch ticking).
3. Describe Bierce's literary technique using foreshadowing and its effect of fully engaging his reader.
4. Explain the metaphor that "Death is a dignitary" in the first paragraph.
5. What examples of military etiquette or rules of conduct are described in the story? Why are these important?
6. What do the bridge and the fast-moving water below represent? Explain the symbolic meaning of the loose boards and "unsteady footing."
7. Explain what Farquhar's wife represents. Why does he reject what she represents in his reckless mission to suppress Union forces?
8. Do we know whether Farquhar actually burned the bridge? Though we are told the Union scout planted the idea in Farquhar's mind to burn the bridge and then must have reported Farquhar's betrayal which resulted in his sentence to be hanged, how do we know he actually committed the crime and deserves to be hanged?
9. Describe the transcendental experience of Farquhar willing the noose to give way and envisioning his escape into the arms of his wife and safety, then the "white light" rather than the reality of his corpse's broken bones of death.
10. Describe the symbolism of the "pendulum" (first paragraph of section III) and how it relates to time, the hanging, the protagonist's emotions, etc.
11. The Federal troops were required to comply with the [Lieber Code](#), instructions for armies in the field, imposed by President Lincoln in 1863. Discuss the soldiers' conduct described in the story. Do they follow the letter of the Lieber Code?