

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE: PART I

TEACHER GUIDE

BACKGROUND

Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* gives us a unique perspective by presenting war from the inside out. The antagonist of the story's protagonist, "the youth" Henry Fleming, is not the physical opponents he faces on the battlefield but against the monsters he faces in his own mind. The youth's goal is to master his inner demons in order to prove himself brave to others. Because of this psychological approach to war, the story still resonates with readers today.

Surprisingly, Crane never fought in the Civil War. (He wrote the novel thirty years after the war's end.) Nor had he ever participated in any battle or even witnessed one at the time of the book's publication. Instead he relied on new stories and interviews with real-life Civil War veterans. Considering this lack of real-life experience, Crane's rendering of the psychological realities of war is a staggering work of imagination.

SUMMARY

The youth Henry Fleming, the protagonist of the story, is a young soldier in the Union army, and his troop of soldiers has been stationary for many days. A tall soldier named Jim spreads a rumor that the regiment will soon be moving, but a loud soldier named Wilson laughs at the tall soldier's foolishness. Meanwhile, the youth recalls how he came to enlist in the Union army.

The youth was spurred to enlist by the

thought of glory, but his mother tried to discourage him. When he enlisted in spite of her warnings, her goodbye speech was not the romantic one he imagined. She simply warned him that soldiers are a hard lot, and he should avoid drinking and other vices. As the youth left his mother behind, he saw that she was weeping and shaking. As the youth marched to join his company, girls noticed his new uniform and old men patted his back.

Now after months in the army he wonders why he joined. The youth begins to wonder if he will run when he finally encounters a fight. He is afraid of his first battle, and he does not believe that the other soldiers share his fear. They seem excited about the thought of battle. Two soldiers, who are the youth's friends, are constantly bickering—the tall soldier and the loud soldier.

When battle finally does come, it comes without warning: The youth is roused from sleep and finds himself running through the countryside without much direction of what he is running toward or what his superiors' plans are. As he hears the noise of battle, he passes a dead body in the midst of a field. This sight causes him to halt in fear, but his lieutenant spurs him on.

The regiment is commanded to build up a wall to shelter themselves. During this process the loud soldier betrays his own fear to the youth—pulling a yellow envelope out of his jacket with document for the youth to give to his family. The loud soldier feels that he will not survive the battle.

As the enemy engages the soldier, the tension rises in the youth's mind. He sees another soldier attempt to flee, but the lieutenant seizes him and forces him back to the line. The battle continues, soldiers are



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PART I

CAST

YOUTH	<i>Teenage Union Soldier</i>
MOTHER	<i>Mother of the Youth</i>
LOUD SOLDIER	<i>Comrade of the Youth</i>
TALL SOLDIER	<i>Comrade of the Youth</i>
BOY	<i>Friend of the Youth</i>
GIRL	<i>Countryside Girl</i>
SOLDIER	<i>Older Soldier</i>
COLONEL	<i>Army Officer</i>
LIEUTENANT	<i>Army Officer</i>
MAN ONE	<i>Union Soldier</i>
MAN TWO	<i>Union Soldier</i>
CONFEDERATE	<i>Enemy Soldier</i>

NARRATOR: The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness at the noise

of rumors. (*sounds of an army camp awakening*)

LOUD SOLDIER: Well, watcha think? Think we'll move today?

MAN ONE: Ah. We'll never move!

NARRATOR: The army cast its eyes upon the roads, which were growing from long troughs of liquid mud to proper thoroughfares. A river, amber-tinted in the shadow of its banks, purred at the army's feet.

MAN TWO: I like the looks of things better in the daylight. Can't see them campfires across the way.

NARRATOR: At night, when the stream became a sorrowful blackness, one could see across it the red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp-fires set in the low brows of distant hills.

Just then a certain tall soldier came flying back from the stream waving his laundry banner-like.

TALL SOLDIER: Whoo, boys! Listen up! We're goin' to move tomorrow for sure!

LOUD SOLDIER: That's a thunderin' lie! This derned old army's never going to move! We've been here two weeks and haven't moved yet!

TALL SOLDIER: It's true! And I'll bust the mouth of anyone who says otherwise!

NARRATOR: He and the loud one came near to fighting over it, and many of the men engaged in a spirited debate.



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PART II

CAST

YOUTH	<i>Teenage soldier</i>
LOUD SOLDIER	<i>Comrade of the Youth</i>
TALL SOLDIER	<i>Comrade of the Youth</i>
GENERAL	<i>Army Commander</i>
LIEUTENANT	<i>Army Officer</i>
TATTERED MAN	<i>Wounded Soldier</i>
CHEERY MAN	<i>Friendly Soldier</i>
ANGRY MAN	<i>Fleeing Soldier</i>
SARCASTIC MAN	<i>Cynical Soldier</i>

NARRATOR: The youth ran like a blind man through the forest. Ever since he had turned his back on the fight, his fears had only magnified. Now opposed to death smiting him between the eyes, he felt death was about to smite him through the shoulder blades instead. He knocked his

shoulder so heavily against a tree that he fell down headlong. *(falling sound)*

YOUTH: *(to himself)* Get up, Henry! Get up!

NARRATOR: He thought of his regiment back at the front lines, who must be dying by now. Death must take those closest first, so he sprinted to keep them far behind him.

YOUTH: If those machine-like fools will not run, let them die!

(whistling of a shell and explosion)

NARRATOR: A shell lit the ground before the youth, and the livid lightning of the explosion sent him groveling. Then he sprang up and went careening off through some bushes until the sight of a mounted general through the trees caused him to pause breathlessly. The general's aide, standing nearby, had just delivered a battle report.

GENERAL: What? I can't believe it! They've held 'em! By heaven, they held 'em!

NARRATOR: As the general beamed down upon the earth like the sun, the youth realized he was speaking of his regiment. They had not perished. Against all odds, they had held the line.

YOUTH: *(to himself)* I fled, and they won!

NARRATOR: The youth cringed as if he had been discovered in a crime. The imbecile line had remained and become victors! He lifted himself upon his toes and looked in the direction of the fight. A yellow fog lay wallowing on the treetops. *(sounds of faraway cheering)*

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1. **Infer:** What does the phrase “red badge of courage” sound like to you?
2. What does the tall soldier announce to the other soldiers?
3. **Define:** What does the term *youth* mean?
4. How does the youth’s mother react when he tells her his plans to enlist?
5. What is a piece of advice she gives to him?
6. How does the youth’s farewell to his mother go differently than he had imagined?
7. What is the youth trying to prove to himself?
8. The youth searches for what in the faces of his comrades?
9. **Analyze:** What is an example of vivid imagery from the story so far?
10. What does a soldier attempt to steal from a farmhouse?
11. What causes the youth to pause as he passes through a field?
12. What are two details about the thing he sees in the field?