

The Red Badge of Courage

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 3,462

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Part 13

Connections

Writing

Write an essay that explains how the author characterizes the soldiers through dialect and dialogue. Then explain how the dialect influences your connection to the characters.

Social Studies and Art

Research the social, political, and economic outcomes of the U.S. Civil War. Create a poster that shows the effects of the war in one of these three areas.

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Adapted from the Writings of Stephen Crane
Illustrated by Aaron McConnell

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THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Stephen Crane
(1871–1900)



Stephen Crane was an American writer of poems, short stories, and novels. He wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895 without ever having been in battle. Following the success of the novel, he worked as a war correspondent in Greece and Cuba. He died of tuberculosis at age twenty-eight.

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Focus Question

How does the way the men talk about the war compare to their behavior in the midst of it?

Words to Know

bandied	oblivious
bated	perturbation
celerity	poignant
clamor	portentous
deacon	prattled
disheveled	prodigious
dubbed	scoffings
emaciated	succor
expletives	trifle
gaunt	vehement
jaunty	vexation
jimhickey	wager

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y–Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+

In Part 12 of The Red Badge of Courage, Henry and Wilson bravely lead a charge that starts well but falters short of the objective. Henry seizes the Union flag when the color sergeant is mortally wounded at his side.

Chapter 21

Presently they knew that no firing threatened them. All ways seemed once more opened to them. The dusty blue lines of their friends were disclosed a short distance away. In the distance there were many colossal noises, but in all this part of the field there was a sudden stillness.

They perceived that they were free. The depleted band drew a long breath of relief and gathered itself into a bunch to complete its trip.

In this last length of journey the men began to show strange emotions. They hurried with nervous fear. Some who had been dark and unfaltering in the grimmest moments now could not conceal an anxiety that made them frantic. It was perhaps that they dreaded to be killed in insignificant ways after the times for proper military deaths had passed. Or, perhaps, they thought it would be too ironical to get killed at the portals of safety. With backward looks of **perturbation**, they hastened.

As they approached their own lines there was some sarcasm exhibited on the part of a **gaunt** and bronzed regiment that lay resting in the shade of the trees. Questions were wafted to them.



"Where th' hell yeh been?"

"What yeh comin' back fer?"

"Why didn't yeh stay there?"

"Was it warm out there, sonny?"

"Goin' home now, boys?"

One shouted in taunting mimicry: "Oh, mother, come quick an' look at th' sojers!"

There was no reply from the bruised and battered regiment, save that one man made broadcast challenges to fist fights and the red-bearded officer walked rather near and glared in great swashbuckler style at a tall captain in the other regiment. But the lieutenant suppressed the man who wished to fist fight, and the tall captain, flushing at the little fanfare of the red-bearded one, was obliged to look intently at some trees.

The youth's tender flesh was deeply stung by these remarks. From under his creased brows he glowered with hate at the mockers. He meditated upon a few revenges. Still, many in the regiment hung their heads in criminal fashion, so that it came to pass that the men trudged with sudden heaviness, as if they bore upon their bended shoulders the coffin of their honor.

They turned when they arrived at their old position to regard the ground over which they had charged.

The youth discovered that the distances, as compared with the brilliant measurings of his mind, were trivial and ridiculous. The stolid trees, where much had taken place, seemed incredibly near. The time, too, had been short. He wondered at the number of emotions and events that had been crowded into such little spaces.

It seemed, then, that there was bitter justice in the speeches of the gaunt and bronzed veterans. He veiled a glance of disdain at his fellows, red from perspiration, misty-eyed, **disheveled**.

They were gulping at their canteens, fierce to wring every mite of water from them, and they polished at their swollen and watery features with coat sleeves and bunches of grass.

However, to the youth there was a considerable joy in musing upon his performances during the charge. He had had very little time previously in which to appreciate himself, so that there was now much satisfaction in quietly thinking of his actions. He recalled bits of color that in the flurry had stamped themselves unawares upon his engaged senses.

As the regiment lay heaving from its hot exertions the officer who had named them as mule drivers came galloping along the line. He had lost his cap. His tousled hair streamed wildly, and his face was dark with **vexation** and wrath. His temper was displayed with more clearness by the way in which he managed his horse. He jerked and wrenched savagely at his bridle, stopping the hard-breathing animal with a furious pull near the colonel of the regiment. He immediately exploded in reproaches which came unbidden to the ears of the men. They were suddenly alert, being always curious about black words between officers.

“Oh, thunder, MacChesnay, what an awful bull you made of this thing!” began the officer. He attempted low tones, but his indignation caused certain of the men to learn the sense of his words. “What an awful mess you made! Good Lord, man, you stopped about a hundred feet this side of a very pretty success! If your men had gone a hundred feet farther you would have made a great charge, but as it is—what a lot of mud diggers you’ve got anyway!”

The men, listening with **bated** breath, now turned their curious eyes upon the colonel. They had a ragamuffin interest in this affair.



The colonel was seen to straighten his form. He wore an injured air; it was as if a **deacon** had been accused of stealing. The men were wiggling in an ecstasy of excitement.

But of a sudden the colonel's manner changed from that of a deacon to that of a Frenchman. He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well, general, we went as far as we could," he said calmly.

"As far as you could? Did you, b' Gawd?" snorted the other. "Well, that wasn't very far, was it?" he added, with a glance of cold contempt into the other's eyes. "You were intended to make a diversion in favor of Whilterside. How well you succeeded your own ears can now tell you." He wheeled his horse and rode stiffly away.

The colonel, bidden to hear the jarring noises of an engagement in the woods to the left, broke out in vague damnations.

The lieutenant, who had listened with an air of impotent rage, spoke suddenly in firm and undaunted tones. "I don't care what a man is—whether he is a general or what—if he says th' boys didn't put up a good fight out there he's a damned fool."

"Lieutenant," began the colonel, severely, "this is my own affair, and I'll trouble you—"

The lieutenant made an obedient gesture. "All right, colonel, all right," he said. He sat down with an air of being content with himself.

The news that the regiment had been reproached went along the line. For a time the men were bewildered by it. "Good thunder!" they ejaculated, staring at the vanishing form of the general. They conceived it to be a huge mistake.

Presently, however, they began to believe that in truth their efforts had been called light. The youth could see this conviction weigh upon the entire regiment until the men were like cuffed and cursed animals, but withal rebellious.

The friend, with a grievance in his eye, went to the youth. "I wonder what he does want," he said. "He must think we went out there an' played marbles! I never see sech a man!"

The youth developed a tranquil philosophy for these moments of irritation. "Oh, well," he rejoined, "he probably didn't see nothing of it at all and got mad as blazes, and concluded we were a lot of sheep, just because we didn't do what he wanted done. It's a pity old Grandpa Henderson got killed yestirday—he'd have known that we did our best and fought good. It's just our awful luck, that's what."

"I should say so," replied the friend. He seemed to be deeply wounded at an injustice. "I should say we did have awful luck! There's no fun in fightin' fer people when everything yeh do—no matter what—ain't done right. I have a notion t' stay behind next time an' let 'em take their ol' charge an' go t' th' devil with it."

The youth spoke soothingly to his comrade. "Well, we both did good. I'd like to see the fool what'd say we both didn't do as good as we could!"

"Of course we did," declared the friend stoutly. "An' I'd break th' feller's neck if he was as big as a church. But we're all right, anyhow, for I heard one feller say that we two fit th' best in th' reg'ment, an' they had a great argument 'bout it. Another feller, 'a course, he had t' up an' say it was a lie—he seen all what was goin' on an' he never seen us from th' beginnin' t' th' end. An' a lot more stuck in an' ses it wasn't a lie—we did fight like thunder, an' they give us quite a sendoff. But this is what I can't stand—these everlastin' ol' soldiers, titterin' an' laughin', an then that general, he's crazy."

The youth exclaimed with sudden exasperation: "He's a lunkhead! He makes me mad. I wish he'd come along next time. We'd show 'im what—"

He ceased because several men had come hurrying up. Their faces expressed great news.

"O Flem, yeh jest oughta heard!" cried one, eagerly.

"Heard what?" said the youth.

"Yeh jest oughta heard!" repeated the other, and he arranged himself to tell his tidings. The others made an excited circle. "Well, sir, th' colonel met your lieutenant right by us—it was damndest thing I ever heard—an' he ses: 'Ahem! ahem!' he ses. 'Mr. Hasbrouck!' he ses, 'by th' way, who was that lad what carried th' flag?' he ses. There, Flemin', what d' yeh think 'a that? 'Who was th' lad what carried th' flag?' he ses, an' th' lieutenant, he speaks up right away: 'That's Flemin', an' he's a **jimhickey**,' he ses, right away. What? I say he did. 'A jimhickey,' he ses—those 'r his words. He did, too. I say he did. If you kin tell this story better than I kin, go ahead an' tell it. Well, then, keep yer mouth shet.

"Th' lieutenant, he ses: 'He's a jimhickey,' and th' colonel, he ses: 'Ahem! ahem! he is, indeed, a very good man t' have, ahem! He kep' th' flag 'way t' th' front. I saw 'im. He's a good un,' ses th' colonel.

“‘You bet,’ ses th’ lieutenant, ‘he an’ a feller named Wilson was at th’ head ‘a th’ charge, an’ howlin’ like Indians all th’ time,’ he ses. ‘Head ‘a th’ charge all th’ time,’ he ses. ‘A feller named Wilson,’ he ses. There, Wilson, m’ boy, put that in a letter an’ send it hum t’ yer mother, hay? ‘A feller named Wilson,’ he ses. An’ th’ colonel, he ses: ‘Were they, indeed? Ahem! ahem! My sakes!’ he ses. ‘At th’ head ‘a th’ reg’ment?’ he ses. ‘They were,’ ses th’ lieutenant. ‘My sakes!’ ses th’ colonel. He ses: ‘Well, well, well,’ he ses. ‘They deserve t’ be major-generals.’”

The youth and his friend had said: “Huh!” “Yer lyin’ Thompson.” “Oh, go t’ blazes!” “He never sed it.” “Oh, what a lie!” “Huh!” But despite these youthful **scoffings** and embarrassments, they knew that their faces were deeply flushing from thrills of pleasure. They exchanged a secret glance of joy and congratulation.

They speedily forgot many things. The past held no pictures of error and disappointment. They were very happy, and their hearts swelled with grateful affection for the colonel and the youthful lieutenant.

Chapter 22

When the woods again began to pour forth the dark-hued masses of the enemy the youth felt serene self-confidence. He smiled briefly when he saw men dodge and duck at the long screechings of shells that were thrown in giant handfuls over them. He stood, erect and tranquil, watching the attack begin against a part of the line that made a blue curve along the side of an adjacent hill. His vision being unmolested by smoke from the rifles of his companions, he had opportunities to see parts of the hard fight. It was a relief to perceive at last from whence came some of these noises which had been roared into his ears.



Off a short way he saw two regiments fighting a little separate battle with two other regiments. It was in a cleared space, wearing a set-apart look. They were blazing as if upon a **wager**, giving and taking tremendous blows. The firings were incredibly fierce and rapid. These intent regiments apparently were **oblivious** of all larger purposes of war, and were slugging each other as if at a matched game.

In another direction he saw a magnificent brigade going with the evident intention of driving the enemy from a wood. They passed in out of sight and presently there was a most awe-inspiring racket in the wood. The noise was unspeakable. Having stirred this **prodigious** uproar, and, apparently, finding it too prodigious, the brigade, after a little time, came marching airily out again with its fine formation in nowise disturbed. There were no traces of speed in its movements. The brigade was **jaunty** and seemed to point a proud thumb at the yelling wood.

On a slope to the left there was a long row of guns, gruff and maddened, denouncing the enemy, who, down through the woods, were forming for another attack in the pitiless monotony of conflicts. The round red discharges from the guns made a crimson flare and a high, thick smoke.

Occasional glimpses could be caught of groups of the toiling artillerymen. In the rear of this row of guns stood a house, calm and white, amid bursting shells. A congregation of horses, tied to a long railing, were tugging frenziedly at their bridles. Men were running hither and thither.

The detached battle between the four regiments lasted for some time. There chanced to be no interference, and they settled their dispute by themselves. They struck savagely and powerfully at each other for a period of minutes, and then the lighter-hued regiments faltered and drew back, leaving the dark-blue lines shouting. The youth could see the two flags shaking with laughter amid the smoke remnants.

Presently there was a stillness, pregnant with meaning. The blue lines shifted and changed a **trifle** and stared expectantly at the silent woods and fields before them. The hush was solemn and churchlike, save for a distant battery that, evidently unable to remain quiet, sent a faint rolling thunder over the ground. It irritated, like the noises of unimpressed boys. The men imagined that it would prevent their perched ears from hearing the first words of the new battle.

Of a sudden the guns on the slope roared out a message of warning. A spluttering sound had begun in the woods. It swelled with amazing speed to a profound **clamor** that involved the earth in noises. The splitting crashes swept along the lines. To those in the midst of it, it became a din fitted to the universe. It was the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery, complications among the smaller stars. The youth's ears were filled cups. They were incapable of hearing more.

On an incline over which a road wound he saw wild and desperate rushes of men perpetually backward and forward in riotous surges. These parts of the opposing armies were two long waves that pitched upon each other madly at dictated points. To and fro they swelled. Sometimes, one side by its yells and cheers would proclaim decisive blows, but a moment later the other side would be all yells and cheers. Once the youth saw a spray of light forms go in houndlike leaps toward the waving blue lines. There was much howling, and presently it went away with a vast mouthful of prisoners. Again, he saw a blue wave dash with such thunderous force against a gray obstruction that it seemed to clear the earth of it and leave nothing but trampled sod. And always in their swift and deadly rushes to and fro the men screamed and yelled like maniacs.

Particular pieces of fence or secure positions behind collections of trees were wrangled over, as gold thrones or pearl bedsteads. There were desperate lunges at these chosen spots seemingly every instant, and most of them were **banded** like light toys between the contending forces. The youth could not tell from the battle flags flying like crimson foam in many directions which color of cloth was winning.

His **emaciated** regiment bustled forth with undiminished fierceness when its time came. When assaulted again by bullets, the men burst out in a barbaric cry of rage and pain. They bent their heads in aims of intent hatred behind the projected hammers of their guns. Their ramrods clanged loud with fury as their eager arms pounded the cartridges into the rifle barrels. The front of the regiment was a smoke-wall penetrated by the flashing points of yellow and red.

Wallowing in the fight, they were in an astonishingly short time resmudged. They surpassed in stain and dirt all their previous appearances. Moving to and fro with strained exertion, jabbering all the while, they were, with their swaying bodies, black faces, and glowing eyes, like strange and ugly fiends jigging heavily in the smoke.

The lieutenant, returning from a tour after a bandage, produced new and **portentous** oaths suited to the emergency. Strings of **expletives** he swung lashlike over the backs of his men, and it was evident that his previous efforts had in nowise impaired his resources.

The youth, still the bearer of the colors, did not feel his idleness. He was deeply absorbed as a spectator. The crash and swing of the great drama made him lean forward, intent-eyed, his face working in small contortions. Sometimes he **prattled**, words coming unconsciously from him in grotesque exclamations. He did not know that he breathed; that the flag hung silently over him, so absorbed was he.

A formidable line of the enemy came within dangerous range. They could be seen plainly—tall, gaunt men with excited faces running with long strides toward a wandering fence.

At sight of this danger the men suddenly ceased their cursing monotone. There was an instant of strained silence before they threw up their rifles and fired a plumping volley at the foes. There had been no order given; the men, upon recognizing the menace, had immediately let drive their flock of bullets without waiting for word of command.

But the enemy were quick to gain the protection of the wandering line of fence. They slid down behind it with remarkable **celerity**, and from this position they began briskly to slice up the blue men.

These latter braced their energies for a great struggle. Often, white clinched teeth shone from the dusky faces. Many heads surged to and fro, floating upon a pale sea of smoke. Those behind the fence frequently shouted and yelped in taunts and gibelike cries, but the regiment maintained a stressed silence. Perhaps, at this new assault the men recalled the fact that they had been named mud diggers, and it made their situation thrice bitter. They were breathlessly intent upon keeping the ground and thrusting away the rejoicing body of the enemy. They fought swiftly and with a despairing savageness denoted in their expressions.

The youth had resolved not to budge whatever should happen. Some arrows of scorn that had buried themselves in his heart had generated strange and unspeakable hatred. It was clear to him that his final and absolute revenge was to be achieved by his dead body lying, torn and glittering, upon the field.

This was to be a **poignant** retaliation upon the officer who had said “mule drivers,” and later “mud diggers,” for in all the wild graspings of his mind for a unit responsible for his sufferings and commotions he always seized upon the man who had **dubbed** him wrongly. And it was his idea, vaguely formulated, that his corpse would be for those eyes a great and salt reproach.

The regiment bled extravagantly. Grunting bundles of blue began to drop. The orderly sergeant of the youth’s company was shot through the cheeks. Its supports being injured, his jaw hung afar down, yet in spite of this he made attempts to cry out. In his endeavor there was a dreadful earnestness, as if he conceived that one great shriek would make him well.

The youth saw him presently go rearward. His strength seemed in nowise impaired. He ran swiftly, casting wild glances for **succor**.

Others fell down about the feet of their companions. Some of the wounded crawled out and away, but many lay still, their bodies twisted into impossible shapes.

The youth looked once for his friend. He saw a **vehement** young man, powder-smeared and frowzled, whom he knew to be him. The lieutenant, also, was unscathed in his position at the rear. He had continued to curse, but it was now with the air of a man who was using his last box of oaths.

For the fire of the regiment had begun to wane and drip. The robust voice, that had come strangely from the thin ranks, was growing rapidly weak.

Glossary

bandied (<i>v.</i>)	passed back and forth, often in a casual or careless way (p. 18)
bated (<i>adj.</i>)	lessened or restrained (p. 7)
celerity (<i>n.</i>)	swiftness or rapidity (p. 20)
clamor (<i>n.</i>)	a loud, harsh noise, especially one caused by people shouting (p. 17)
deacon (<i>n.</i>)	a minister ranking below a priest in some Christian churches (p. 9)
disheveled (<i>adj.</i>)	messy or disordered (p. 6)
dubbed (<i>v.</i>)	called a specific nickname or title (p. 21)
emaciated (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely thin due to disease or lack of food (p. 18)
expletives (<i>n.</i>)	exclamatory words or phrases, especially swear words (p. 19)
gaunt (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely thin and worn down (p. 4)
jaunty (<i>adj.</i>)	energetic, self-confident, and animated in appearance or manner (p. 15)
jimhickey (<i>n.</i>)	slang for a person who is excellent (p. 12)
oblivious (<i>adj.</i>)	completely unaware (p. 15)

perturbation (<i>n.</i>)	a state of upset, worry, or confusion (p. 3)
poignant (<i>adj.</i>)	causing deep or painful feelings (p. 21)
portentous (<i>adj.</i>)	of, relating to, or containing a warning or sign of something bad (p. 19)
prattled (<i>v.</i>)	chattered foolishly about unimportant topics or made meaningless sounds (p. 19)
prodigious (<i>adj.</i>)	impressive or amazing in size or degree (p. 15)
scoffings (<i>n.</i>)	mean or mocking expressions of dislike or disapproval (p. 13)
succor (<i>n.</i>)	relief, aid, or deliverance (p. 21)
trifle (<i>n.</i>)	a small amount; a bit (p. 16)
vehement (<i>adj.</i>)	marked by strong emotion (p. 22)
vexation (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being worried or irritated (p. 7)
wager (<i>n.</i>)	something risked on an uncertain outcome or unpredictable event; a bet (p. 15)