

LEVEL Z2

Grades

5 and above

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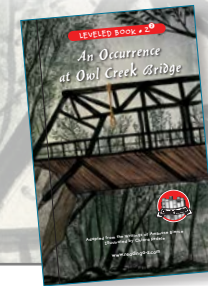
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An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

Author: Ambrose Bierce**Illustrator: Chiara Fedele**

Book Summary

Set in Alabama during the Civil War, this story tells of the hanging of Peyton Farquhar, a civilian Confederate sympathizer. Hands tied, noose around his neck, and surrounded by armed soldiers, the condemned man nonetheless imagines a way he might escape death and return home to his wife and children. The story shifts back in time, showing Farquhar's encounter with a Federal scout disguised as a Confederate soldier who entraps Farquhar by giving him the idea to burn down the bridge. The story jumps forward in time, back to the hanging, and Farquhar makes a daring escape after his rope snaps. After falling into the water and dodging bullets, Farquhar engages in a surreal journey toward his home. The end of Farquhar's story, however, will make readers want to reexamine everything.

Reading Strategy: Make, Revise, and Confirm Predictions
Comprehension Skill: Character Point of View

Level Z2 • Fiction/Classic • 1 Part

How to Use the Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is designed to be used with Reading A-Z's retelling of *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. Worksheets support the learning objectives of the lesson. Discussion cards can be used to set up literature circles. A comprehension quiz accompanies the lesson plan.

About the Lesson

Targeted Reading Strategy

- Make, revise, and confirm predictions

Objectives

- Use the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions before and during reading
- Identify the character point of view in a story
- Recognize and use adjectives
- Identify similes in a text and construct sentences that include similes

Materials

- Book: *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* (copy for each student or group)
- Make, revise, and confirm predictions; character point of view; adjectives worksheets
- Discussion Cards
- Quiz

Before Reading

Build Background

- Explain to students that this story is set during the Civil War. Ask students to discuss with a partner what they know about the Civil War and then share one or two facts about the Civil War with the class. Record these details in the board.
- Explain that the author of this story joined the Union Army during the Civil War. Review or explain that the Union Army, which is referred to as the Federal Army in this story, was made up mostly of Northerners and the Confederate army was made up mostly of Southern white men. Present to students photographs, books, videos, or other resources that help describe the two armies.
- Display a map of the United States and have students locate and point to Alabama on the map. Explain that this story is set in Alabama, a state that seceded from the Union after the election of Abraham Lincoln.

Introduce the Book

- Distribute copies of *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, by Ambrose Bierce.
- Ask students to look at the cover art and read the short biography of the author. Have students discuss what they know about the book from their preview.

Introduce the Reading Strategy:

Make, revise, and confirm predictions

- Review or explain to students that one way readers understand a story is to make predictions about what might happen next. Remind students that they use clues from the text and their own experience to make predictions, and that making reasonable predictions is more important than having predictions confirmed, or proven right.
- Model making a prediction on the basis of the title and cover art.
Think aloud: *I see from the title that this story is about something that happened at a bridge. In the picture on the cover, I see a noose tied to a bridge, which makes me think that the story must have something to do with a hanging. I predict that this place is Owl Creek bridge and that the*

occurrence in the story involves the hanging of someone. I'll have to read the story to find out if my prediction is confirmed. Also, as I read more details in the story, I might want to revise my prediction.

- Have students make predictions about what they think will happen in the story on the basis of the text and illustration on page 3. Invite volunteers to share their predictions with the rest of the class and record them on the board. Discuss with students whether the predictions are reasonable considering the information students currently know.
- Introduce and explain the make-revise-and-confirm-predictions worksheet. Ask students to fill out the worksheet as they read, adding new predictions as they make them, and revising and confirming their predictions as applicable.
- Explain to students that making predictions draws on other skills, such as sequencing events, identifying story elements, and identifying problem and solution. Encourage students to use other reading strategies in addition to making, revising, and confirming predictions.

Introduce the Comprehension Skill: *Character point of view*

- Review or explain to students that one way to understand the plot of a story is by considering from whose point of view the story is being told. Explain that first person and third person are the two most common types of point of view.
- Explain that in a first-person story, the narrator is one of the characters and is telling the story as if speaking directly to the reader. In these cases, the narrator uses the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* to refer to himself or herself. Write these first-person pronouns on the board underneath the words *first person*.
- Explain that third person is the most common point of view in literature and that in these cases the narrator is not one of the characters in the story, but a detached observer who is describing the events in the story to the reader. The story therefore uses the pronouns *he*, *she*, *her*, and *him* to refer to the characters. Write these pronouns on the board underneath the words *third person*.

- Discuss with students the difference between third-person omniscient (the narrator knows the thoughts of all characters) and third-person limited (the narrator knows only one character's thoughts). Write *omniscient* and *limited* on the board.
- Have students work in groups to read pages 3 and 4 and determine the point of view from clues in the text. Call on groups to share their conclusion with the rest of the class, and guide students to a consensus that the story is set in the third-person point of view. Point out that third-person stories may feel somewhat remote, as if the reader is watching and eavesdropping on the characters in the story.
- Encourage students to continue look for clues to the point of view as they read to help them determine whether the story is third-person omniscient or third-person limited.

Introduce the Vocabulary

- The text contains academic and domain-specific vocabulary as well as figurative language. Direct students to write down unfamiliar words to be researched later.
- Remind students that they can use word-attack strategies to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. Encourage them to look at the context of difficult words, along with any root words, prefixes, or suffixes that they recognize.

Set the Purpose

- To set a purpose for reading, have students read the focus question at the beginning of the book and look for evidence in the text that supports their answer.



During Reading

Student Reading

- **Guide the reading:** Have students stop reading periodically to review their make-revise-and-confirm-predictions worksheet and see if any predictions were confirmed or need to be revised. Ask students to also add any new predictions they formed as they read. Encourage students to share their predictions with a partner before resuming reading.
- Remind students to consider the point of view in this narrative as they read. Guide their thinking with questions such as the following: *Who is the main character? Who is the narrator? What is the narrator's perspective on events and characters?* Have students form groups at appropriate points throughout the reading to discuss the details in the text that establish point of view and to determine whether it is third-person omniscient or third-person limited.
- Assign the entire book to all students, or divide the class into small groups and have each group read one section.

Check for Understanding Section by Section

Pages 3–8

- **Summary:** Federal soldiers, with dispassionate military precision, are about to hang a plantation owner from a railroad bridge. The condemned man is standing on a platform of loose planks laid over the rails with armed guards surrounding him. He is not blindfolded and can see how he will fall after the soldier steps off the plank across the rails. He directs his thoughts away from what is going on around him, back to his wife and family. As his death by hanging becomes even more imminent, the man imagines a way he might be able to escape death and return home to his wife and children.
- **Explanation:** The story is set in Alabama during the Civil War when Federal soldiers were advancing into northern Alabama. Many white Alabamans, like the character Peyton Farquhar and his family, were

economically dependent on slave labor and wanted to preserve the Southern way of life. Men like Farquhar supported the Confederacy and resented the invasion of their homeland by the Federal Army.

- **Comprehension (Author's Purpose):** Ask students why they think the author chose to write about the Civil War and a hanging (*to create a suspenseful story that would be interesting and entertaining to read, to focus on a particular aspect of the Civil War, and so on*). Review or explain the three common author's purposes for writing: to entertain, inform, and persuade. Discuss with students how an author can have more than one purpose for writing a story. Discuss how the author's purpose for writing this story was most likely to entertain readers, and ask if they can identify a secondary purpose (*to inform readers about the Civil War*).
- **Figurative Language (Personification):** Have students turn to the bottom of page 6. Review or explain to students that *personification* is a type of figurative language in which human traits are given to nonliving things, such as water. Ask students to point to the phrases "racing madly" and "dancing driftwood" and share with a partner what these phrases are describing and how the things they describe are given human traits. Have students work in groups to create their own sentences that personify other nonliving things from this section of the story, such as the bridge or the noose. Invite volunteers to share their sentences with the rest of the class and write them on the board. Have students point to the verbs or adjectives that give human traits to inanimate objects.

Pages 9–11

- **Summary:** The setting shifts from the bridge, moving in time and space to Farquhar's plantation on a day shortly before his capture and imminent hanging. A man dressed as a Confederate soldier stops at Farquhar's house and asks for a drink of water. He tells Farquhar that the Yanks are repairing the railroads to prepare for another advance and that there is an order to execute anyone who interferes with their plans. The man hints that driftwood near the bridge might easily ignite, slyly suggesting that someone could burn down the bridge and sabotage the Federal Army's advance. Farquhar, who did not join the army due to his "imperious nature," sees this as an opportunity to prove his loyalty to the Southern cause and achieve personal glory. He doesn't realize the man is actually a Federal scout trying to entrap him.

- **Comprehension (Make Inferences / Draw Conclusions):** Have students discuss with a partner what information the author leaves out as the narrative moves from the first section to the second. Invite volunteers to share their ideas to the rest of the class. Explain to students that when short stories involve breaks the author often relies on the reader to infer information about what is going on in between the sections of text. Point out that in this section, readers must come to the conclusion that the narrative has moved back in time because Farquhar is at home, not captured, and is just learning about the bridge. Have students work in groups to discuss these conclusions and other inferences they made while reading the first two sections of the story. Guide student discussion with questions such as the following: *Why does Farquhar ask how far it is to Owl Creek bridge? What does Farquhar mean when he says that he is a student of hanging? What do Farquhar's questions to the soldier suggest that he is going to do?* Have student groups write a list of at least five inferences they can draw from the second section of the story. Call on groups to share their inferences with the rest of the class, identifying the clues from the text that support their inferences. Encourage students to think about the information they are inferring as they move from the second section to the third section of the text.

Pages 12–22

- **Summary:** Picking up shortly after the events described in the first section of the text, Farquhar is falling through the air, clearly having been pushed off the bridge. He loses consciousness as he falls with the noose around his neck. He feels pain and torment and then realizes that the rope must have broken and he is in the water below the bridge. His senses are keener than ever, and he makes a daring escape, dodging bullets by diving deeply underwater. Later, he finds himself on shore, safe from the soldiers' guns, and travels all day through the forest, urged on by thoughts of his wife and children. After falling asleep and waking, Farquhar finds himself close to home and is about to embrace his wife when he is suddenly struck dead. The reader learns that the escape had all been a delusion occurring in a matter of seconds, and Farquhar's dead body is currently swinging from the end of Owl Creek bridge.

- **Comprehension (Analyze Character):** Ask students to write on a separate sheet of paper what they know about Peyton Farquhar, and then support what they wrote with details and examples from the text. Remind students to focus on all aspects of his character, including behavior, personality, and appearance. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the rest of the class. Discuss with students which of the character traits they described were inferred from details given in the text. Then have students identify to a partner one or more of Farquhar's character traits that contributed to his demise.
- **Vocabulary:** *abrasion, blockaded, cannoneer, civilian, commandant, condemned, delirium, diminuendo, executioners, fatigued, Federal Army, gesticulated, infantry, inglorious, intolerable, martinet, muzzle, outpost, provision, ramrods, report, sentinel, stockade, suffocation*

After Reading

Reflect on the Reading Strategy

- Review with students the predictions on the board. Have students point to predictions that were confirmed, and invite volunteers to come to the board and circle those predictions. Invite students to share with the rest of the class any predictions they revised as they read and to identify the details from the text that led to the revision.
- Ask students if anyone predicted the ending. Point out that the author clearly intended to take readers by surprise with the ending. Discuss with students the clues in the text that point to Farquhar's actual fate as he imagines he is escaping (*his neck is in increasing pain, he thinks the stars are arranged in a secret order, his tongue is swelling, he thinks he hears strange whispers in an unknown tongue, and so on*).
- **Independent practice:** Have students complete their make-revise-and-confirm-predictions worksheet. Then have students exchange worksheets with a partner and describe some of their predictions and any revisions they made. Discuss with students why it is more important to make an accurate prediction than it is to have a prediction confirmed.

Reflect on the Comprehension Skill

- Review the terms on the board that describe a narrative's point of view, and remind students that they already determined a third-person point of view for this story. Ask students to work in groups to decide whether the text is third-person limited or third-person omniscient (third-person limited). Invite volunteers to identify their choice and explain their reasoning. Confirm for students that the narrative is in the third person but is focused only on Farquhar's thoughts.
- Have students work with a partner to locate and highlight five passages that clearly demonstrate the narrator describing Farquhar's thoughts. Discuss with students how this technique is different from having the narrative in the first person with Farquhar as narrator.
- Discuss with students how the third-person limited point of view contributed to the strange use of time in the book. Guide the discussion with questions such as the following: *Why does the narrative jump back in time in the second section, and how is this related to Farquhar's thoughts at the end of the first section? In the third section, how does experiencing Farquhar's thoughts make it seem as if the time is longer than it really is? Why does the story need a narrator rather than being told directly by Farquhar? How does the focus on Farquhar's thoughts make the final sentence so surprising?*
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the character-point-of-view worksheet. After students complete their worksheet, invite them to read their original scene with a new point of view to the rest of the class.

Reflect on the Purpose

- Refer students back to the focus question: *How does the author manipulate time in this story to shape the plot?* Have students work in groups to discuss their thoughts on the question and the inferences they must make in order to answer it. Remind them to provide evidence from the text to support their conclusions.
- Discuss with students the various narrative techniques the author used to manipulate time, such as the character point of view, the text structure with its three sections, and the use of flashbacks. Then have students work in their groups to discuss the theme the author developed through his use of time. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

- **Extend the discussion:** In this story, a man in a crisis situation experiences time in a very unusual way. *What experiences have you had where time seemed to be unusually long or short? Why do you think you felt that way?*

Build Skills

Grammar and Mechanics: *Adjectives*

- Call on students to share one descriptive word about Peyton Farquhar in *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. Write their responses on the board.
- Review with students that adjectives are words that describe nouns. Circle the adjectives on the board and reinforce that they describe a noun, in this case the main character in the story. Discuss with students how adjectives contribute to a text by adding detail and precision to the writing.
- Have students turn to page 9 and read aloud the following sentence: *Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with that gallant army.* Have students draw a box around all the adjectives (*imperious, unnecessary, gallant*). Call on students to share an adjective with the rest of the class and record it on the board. Point to an adjective and have students call out the noun it describes.
- If students do not know the meanings of some of these words, encourage them to use their word-attack strategies, such as their knowledge of affixes and their meanings or using a dictionary, to determine their definitions.
- Have students point to the adjective *imperious* in the text and discuss with students how using that adjective adds clarity to the text. (*It suggests that the reason Farquhar was not a soldier in the army was because he was too bossy and arrogant to take orders from someone else.*)
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the adjectives worksheet. If time allows, discuss their answers, especially how each adjective adds to their understanding of the text.

Word Work: *Similes*

- Review or explain to students that a simile compares two unlike things that are similar in at least one way, using the word *like* or *as*. Have students find the phrase *It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds* in the middle of page 19, where Farquhar is throwing handfuls of sand over himself to celebrate his escape. Ask students to discuss with a partner what this simile is comparing and why. Point out that this is a simile because it compares sand and gems, which are very different things but are similar in their value to Farquhar at that moment. Explain that this simile shows that Farquhar's escape, represented by the thrown sand, is as precious as fine jewels.
- Write the following sentence on the board: *My bike is as fast as her bike*. Ask students to give a thumbs-up signal if that sentence is a simile. (No, because the things being compared are the same. Both are bikes.) Then write the following sentence: *My bike is as fast as the wind*. Ask students to give a thumbs-up signal if that sentence is a simile. (Yes, because the things being compared—a bike and the wind—are not alike.) Discuss with students the difference between the two sentences.
- Have students work in small groups to identify other similes in the text and ask groups to share their findings with the class. Write some similes on the board. Have students work with a partner to identify the objects being compared in each simile and to determine the meaning conveyed by the comparison.
- **Independent practice:** Have students write five sentences that use similes to describe Farquhar, the bridge, the river, or other elements from the story. Remind them to use a comparison word, *like* or *as*, in each simile. Invite volunteers to read their sentences to the class. Have the rest of the class identify the two things that are being compared and the comparison word used in the sentence.



Build Fluency

Independent Reading

- Encourage students to read the book independently. Additionally, partners can take turns reading parts of the book to each other.
- Groups of students can read aloud favorite passages of from the book or act out scenes for the class, such as the meeting between Farquhar and the Federal scout, or Farquhar's daring escape.

Home Connection

- Give students their book to take home to read with parents, caregivers, siblings, or friends. Encourage them to make and confirm predictions as they read.

Assessment

Monitor students to determine whether they can:

- accurately use the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions while reading and on a worksheet
- correctly identify and use character point of view in discussion and on a worksheet
- accurately identify and use adjectives during discussion and on a worksheet
- consistently identify similes during discussion

Comprehension Check

- Retelling Rubric
- Book quiz

