

# The Red Badge of Courage

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book  
Word Count: 2,944

LEVELED BOOK • Z<sup>2</sup>

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Part 10

### Connections

#### Writing

In Part 2, Henry worried about taking someone into his confidence because he feared it would give that person power over him. Write an essay that explores the irony of his actions toward Wilson in this part.

#### Social Studies

Research the postal service during the U.S. Civil War. Create a presentation that describes what the system was like and share it with your class.

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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

Where does Henry's newfound confidence come from, and how does he show this internal change?

## Words to Know

abject	laggard
alleged	lugubrious
conciliating	omens
condescension	patronizing
consternation	pompous
contemplated	retribution
discretion	reverberations
doleful	reverie
exultant	stupendous
fracas	sullen
insolence	temerity
jaded	vague

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### Correlation

#### LEVEL Z2

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

*In Part 9 of The Red Badge of Courage, Henry's comrades welcome him back to the regiment and tend his wound. They accept his explanation that he became separated from them after his head was grazed by a bullet during the fighting. Henry is surprised to see how his friend Wilson ("the loud soldier") has matured following the battle.*

## Chapter 15

The regiment was standing at order arms at the side of a lane, waiting for the command to march, when suddenly the youth remembered the little packet enwrapped in a faded yellow envelope which the loud young soldier with **lugubrious** words had intrusted to him. It made him start. He uttered an exclamation and turned toward his comrade.

"Wilson!"

"What?"

His friend, at his side in the ranks, was thoughtfully staring down the road. From some cause his expression was at that moment very meek. The youth, regarding him with sidelong glances, felt impelled to change his purpose. "Oh, nothing," he said.

His friend turned his head in some surprise, "Why, what was yeh goin' t' say?"

"Oh, nothing," repeated the youth.

He resolved not to deal the little blow. It was sufficient that the fact made him glad. It was not necessary to knock his friend on the head with the misguided packet.

He had been possessed of much fear of his friend, for he saw how easily questionings could make holes in his feelings. He felt certain that during the first period of leisure his friend would ask him to relate his adventures of the previous day.

He now rejoiced in the possession of a small weapon with which he could prostrate his comrade at the first signs of a cross-examination. He was master. It would now be he who could laugh and shoot the shafts of derision.

The friend had, in a weak hour, spoken with sobs of his own death. He had delivered a melancholy oration previous to his funeral, and had doubtless in the packet of letters, presented various keepsakes to relatives. But he had not died, and thus he had delivered himself into the hands of the youth.

The latter felt immensely superior to his friend, but he inclined to **condescension**. He adopted toward him an air of **patronizing** good humor.

His self-pride was now entirely restored. In the shade of its flourishing growth he stood with braced and self-confident legs, and since nothing could now be discovered he did not shrink from an encounter with the eyes of judges, and allowed no thoughts of his own to keep him from an attitude of manfulness. He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man.

Indeed, when he remembered his fortunes of yesterday, and looked at them from a distance he began to see something fine there. He had license to be **pompous** and veteranlike.

His panting agonies of the past he put out of his sight.

In the present, he declared to himself that it was only the doomed and the damned who roared with sincerity at circumstance. Few but they ever did it. A man with a full stomach and the respect of his fellows had no business to scold about anything that he might think to be wrong in the ways of the universe, or even with the ways of society. Let the unfortunates rail; the others may play marbles.

He did not give a great deal of thought to these battles that lay directly before him. It was not essential that he should plan his ways in regard to them. He had been taught that many obligations of a life were easily avoided. The lessons of yesterday had been that **retribution** was a **laggard** and blind. With these facts before him he did not deem it necessary that he should become feverish over the possibilities of the ensuing twenty-four hours. He could leave much to chance.

Besides, a faith in himself had secretly blossomed. There was a little flower of confidence growing within him. He was now a man of experience. He had been out among the dragons, he said, and he assured himself that they were not so hideous as he had imagined them. Also, they were inaccurate; they did not sting with precision. A stout heart often defied, and defying, escaped.

And, furthermore, how could they kill him who was the chosen of gods and doomed to greatness?

He remembered how some of the men had run from the battle. As he recalled their terror-struck faces he felt a scorn for them. They had surely been more fleet and more wild than was absolutely necessary. They were weak mortals. As for himself, he had fled with **discretion** and dignity.

He was aroused from this **reverie** by his friend, who, having hitched about nervously and blinked at the trees for a time, suddenly coughed in an introductory way, and spoke.

“Fleming!”

“What?”

The friend put his hand up to his mouth and coughed again. He fidgeted in his jacket.

“Well,” he gulped at last, “I guess yeh might as well give me back them letters.” Dark, prickling blood had flushed into his cheeks and brow.

“All right, Wilson,” said the youth. He loosened two buttons of his coat, thrust in his hand, and brought forth the packet. As he extended it to his friend the latter’s face was turned from him.

He had been slow in the act of producing the packet because during it he had been trying to invent a remarkable comment on the affair. He could conjure up nothing of sufficient point. He was compelled to allow his friend to escape unmolested with his packet. And for this he took unto himself considerable credit. It was a generous thing.

His friend at his side seemed suffering great shame. As he **contemplated** him, the youth felt his heart grow more strong and stout. He had never been compelled to blush in such manner for his acts; he was an individual of extraordinary virtues.

He reflected, with condescending pity: “Too bad! Too bad! The poor devil, it makes him feel tough!”

After this incident, and as he reviewed the battle pictures he had seen, he felt quite competent to return home and make the hearts of the people glow with stories of war. He could see himself in a room of warm tints telling tales to listener. He could exhibit laurels. They were insignificant; still, in a district where laurels were infrequent, they might shine.

He saw his gaping audience picturing him as the central figure in blazing scenes. And he imagined the **consternation** and the ejaculations of his mother and the young lady at the seminary as they drank his recitals. Their **vague** feminine formula for beloved ones doing brave deeds on the field of battle without risk of life would be destroyed.

## Chapter 16

A sputtering of musketry was always to be heard. Later, the cannon had entered the dispute. In the fog-filled air their voices made a thudding sound. The **reverberations** were continual. This part of the world led a strange, battleful existence.

The youth's regiment was marched to relieve a command that had lain long in some damp trenches. The men took positions behind a curving line of rifle pits that had been turned up, like a large furrow, along the line of woods. Before them was a level stretch, peopled with short, deformed stumps. From the woods beyond came the dull popping of the skirmishers and pickets, firing in the fog. From the right came the noise of a terrific **fracas**.



The men cuddled behind the small embankment and sat in easy attitudes awaiting their turn. Many had their backs to the firing. The youth's friend lay down, buried his face in his arms, and almost instantly, it seemed, he was in a deep sleep.

The youth leaned his breast against the brown dirt and peered over at the woods and up and down the line. Curtains of trees interfered with his ways of vision. He could see the low line of trenches but for a short distance. A few idle flags were perched on the dirt hills. Behind them were rows of dark bodies with a few heads sticking curiously over the top.

Always the noise of skirmishers came from the woods on the front and left, and the din on the right had grown to frightful proportions. The guns were roaring without an instant's pause for breath. It seemed that the cannon had come from all parts and were engaged in a **stupendous** wrangle. It became impossible to make a sentence heard.

The youth wished to launch a joke—a quotation from newspapers. He desired to say, "All quiet on the Rappahannock," but the guns refused to permit even a comment upon their uproar. He never successfully concluded the sentence.



But at last the guns stopped, and among the men in the rifle pits rumors again flew, like birds, but they were now for the most part black creatures who flapped their wings drearily near to the ground and refused to rise on any wings of hope. The men's faces grew **doleful** from the interpreting of **omens**. Tales of hesitation and uncertainty on the part of those high in place and responsibility came to their ears. Stories of disaster were borne into their minds with many proofs.

This din of musketry on the right, growing like a released genie of sound, expressed and emphasized the army's plight.

The men were disheartened and began to mutter. They made gestures expressive of the sentence: "Ah, what more can we do?" And it could always be seen that they were bewildered by the **alleged** news and could not fully comprehend a defeat.

Before the gray mists had been totally obliterated by the sun rays, the regiment was marching in a spread column that was retiring carefully through the woods. The disordered, hurrying lines of the enemy could sometimes be seen down through the groves and little fields. They were yelling, shrill and **exultant**.

At this sight the youth forgot many personal matters and became greatly enraged. He exploded in loud sentences. "B' jiminey, we're generated by a lot 'a lunkheads."

"More than one feller has said that t'-day," observed a man.

His friend, recently aroused, was still very drowsy. He looked behind him until his mind took in the meaning of the movement. Then he sighed. "Oh, well, I s'pose we got licked," he remarked sadly.

The youth had a thought that it would not be handsome for him to freely condemn other men. He made an attempt to restrain himself, but the words upon his tongue were too bitter. He presently began a long and intricate denunciation of the commander of the forces.

"Mebbe, it wa'n't all his fault—not all together. He did th' best he knowed. It's our luck t' git licked often," said his friend in a weary tone. He was trudging along with stooped shoulders and shifting eyes like a man who has been caned and kicked.

"Well, don't we fight like the devil? Don't we do all that men can?" demanded the youth loudly.

He was secretly dumfounded at this sentiment when it came from his lips. For a moment his face lost its valor and he looked guiltily about him. But no one questioned his right to deal in such words, and presently he recovered his air of courage. He went on to repeat a statement he had heard going from group to group at the camp that morning. "The brigadier said he never saw a new reg'ment fight the way we fought yestirday, didn't he? And we didn't do better than many another reg'ment, did we? Well, then, you can't say it's th' army's fault, can you?"

In his reply, the friend's voice was stern. "A course not," he said. "No man dare say we don't fight like th' devil. No man will ever dare say it. Th' boys fight like hell-roosters. But still—still, we don't have no luck."

"Well, then, if we fight like the devil an' don't ever whip, it must be the general's fault," said the youth grandly and decisively. "And I don't see any sense in fighting and fighting and fighting, yet always losing through some derved old lunkhead of a general."

A sarcastic man who was tramping at the youth's side, then spoke lazily. "Mebbe yeh think yeh fit th' hull battle yestirday, Fleming," he remarked.

The speech pierced the youth. Inwardly he was reduced to an **abject** pulp by these chance words. His legs quaked privately. He cast a frightened glance at the sarcastic man.

"Why, no," he hastened to say in a **conciliating** voice, "I don't think I fought the whole battle yesterday."

But the other seemed innocent of any deeper meaning. Apparently, he had no information. It was merely his habit. "Oh!" he replied in the same tone of calm derision.

The youth, nevertheless, felt a threat. His mind shrank from going near to the danger, and thereafter he was silent. The significance of the sarcastic man's words took from him all loud moods that would make him appear prominent. He became suddenly a modest person.

There was low-toned talk among the troops. The officers were impatient and snappy, their countenances clouded with the tales of misfortune. The troops, sifting through the forest, were **sullen**. In the youth's company once a man's laugh rang out. A dozen soldiers turned their faces quickly toward him and frowned with vague displeasure.



The noise of firing dogged their footsteps. Sometimes, it seemed to be driven a little way, but it always returned again with increased **insolence**. The men muttered and cursed, throwing black looks in its direction.

In a clear space the troops were at last halted. Regiments and brigades, broken and detached through their encounters with thickets, grew together again and lines were faced toward the pursuing bark of the enemy's infantry.

This noise, following like the yelpings of eager, metallic hounds, increased to a loud and joyous burst, and then, as the sun went serenely up the sky, throwing illuminating rays into the gloomy thickets, it broke forth into prolonged pealings. The woods began to crackle as if afire.

"Whoop-a-dadee," said a man, "here we are! Everybody fightin'. Blood an' destruction."

"I was willin' t' bet they'd attack as soon as th' sun got fairly up," savagely asserted the lieutenant who commanded the youth's company. He jerked without mercy at his little mustache. He strode to and fro with dark dignity in the rear of his men, who were lying down behind whatever protection they had collected.

A battery had trundled into position in the rear and was thoughtfully shelling the distance. The regiment, unmolested as yet, awaited the moment when the gray shadows of the woods before them should be slashed by the lines of flame. There was much growling and swearing.

"Good Gawd," the youth grumbled, "we're always being chased around like rats! It makes me sick. Nobody seems to know where we go or why we go. We just get fired around from pillar to post and get licked here and get licked there, and nobody knows what it's done for. It makes a man feel like a damn' kitten in a bag.

"Now, I'd like to know what the eternal thunders we was marched into these woods for anyhow, unless it was to give the rebs a regular pot shot at us. We came in here and got our legs all tangled up in these cussed briars, and then we begin to fight and the rebs had an easy time of it. Don't tell me it's just luck! I know better. It's this derved old—"

The friend seemed **jaded**, but he interrupted his comrade with a voice of calm confidence. "It'll turn out all right in th' end," he said.

"Oh, the devil it will! You always talk like a dog-hanged parson. Don't tell me! I know—"

At this time there was an interposition by the savage-minded lieutenant, who was obliged to vent some of his inward dissatisfaction upon his men. "You boys shut right up! There no need 'a your wastin' your breath in long-winded arguments about this an' that an' th' other. You've been jawin' like a lot 'a old hens. All you've got t' do is to fight, an' you'll get plenty 'a that t' do in about ten minutes. Less talkin' an' more fightin' is what's best for you boys. I never saw sech gabbling jackasses."

He paused, ready to pounce upon any man who might have the **temerity** to reply. No words being said, he resumed his dignified pacing.

"There's too much chin music an' too little fightin' in this war, anyhow," he said to them, turning his head for a final remark.

The day had grown more white, until the sun shed his full radiance upon the thronged forest. A sort of a gust of battle came sweeping toward that part of the line where lay the youth's regiment. The front shifted a trifle to meet it squarely. There was a wait. In this part of the field there passed slowly the intense moments that precede the tempest.

A single rifle flashed in a thicket before the regiment. In an instant it was joined by many others. There was a mighty song of clashes and crashes that went sweeping through the woods.

The guns in the rear, aroused and enraged by shells that had been thrown burr-like at them, suddenly involved themselves in a hideous altercation with another band of guns. The battle roar settled to a rolling thunder, which was a single, long explosion.

In the regiment there was a peculiar kind of hesitation denoted in the attitudes of the men. They were worn, exhausted, having slept but little and labored much. They rolled their eyes toward the advancing battle as they stood awaiting the shock. Some shrank and flinched. They stood as men tied to stakes.

## Glossary

<b>abject</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	hopeless, desperate, or resigned; without strength or spirit (p. 14)
<b>alleged</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	claimed or asserted to exist or be true (p. 11)
<b>conciliating</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	done for the purpose of making someone less angry or more agreeable; placating (p. 14)
<b>condescension</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the behavior or attitude of one who thinks he or she is better than others; superiority (p. 5)
<b>consternation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	anxiety or dismay that causes surprise or confusion (p. 8)
<b>contemplated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	thought over deeply (p. 8)
<b>discretion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	sound and responsible caution or judgment (p. 6)
<b>doleful</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	feeling or showing great sadness and sorrow (p. 11)
<b>exultant</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	feeling or showing great joy (p. 11)
<b>fracas</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a noisy disturbance or quarrel (p. 9)
<b>insolence</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	insulting and disrespectful speech or behavior (p. 15)
<b>jaded</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	uninterested, cynical, or unenthusiastic because of past experience or overexposure (p. 16)

<b>laggard</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person or thing that tends to fall behind (p. 6)
<b>lugubrious</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	sad, especially in an exaggerated way; mournful or sorrowful (p. 3)
<b>omens</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	signs or indications of something to come (p. 11)
<b>patronizing</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	seemingly kind but with an attitude of pride and superiority (p. 5)
<b>pompous</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having or showing a superior or condescending attitude, often by speaking or behaving in a very formal way (p. 5)
<b>retribution</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	compensation given or received for past deeds, especially in the form of punishment (p. 6)
<b>reverberations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	repeated sounds that bounce off surfaces; echoes (p. 9)
<b>reverie</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a state of being lost in pleasant thoughts or a daydream (p. 7)
<b>stupendous</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	causing surprise or awe (p. 10)
<b>sullen</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	sad and angry (p. 14)
<b>temerity</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	foolhardy boldness; recklessness (p. 17)
<b>vague</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	not clear; indistinct or imprecise (p. 8)