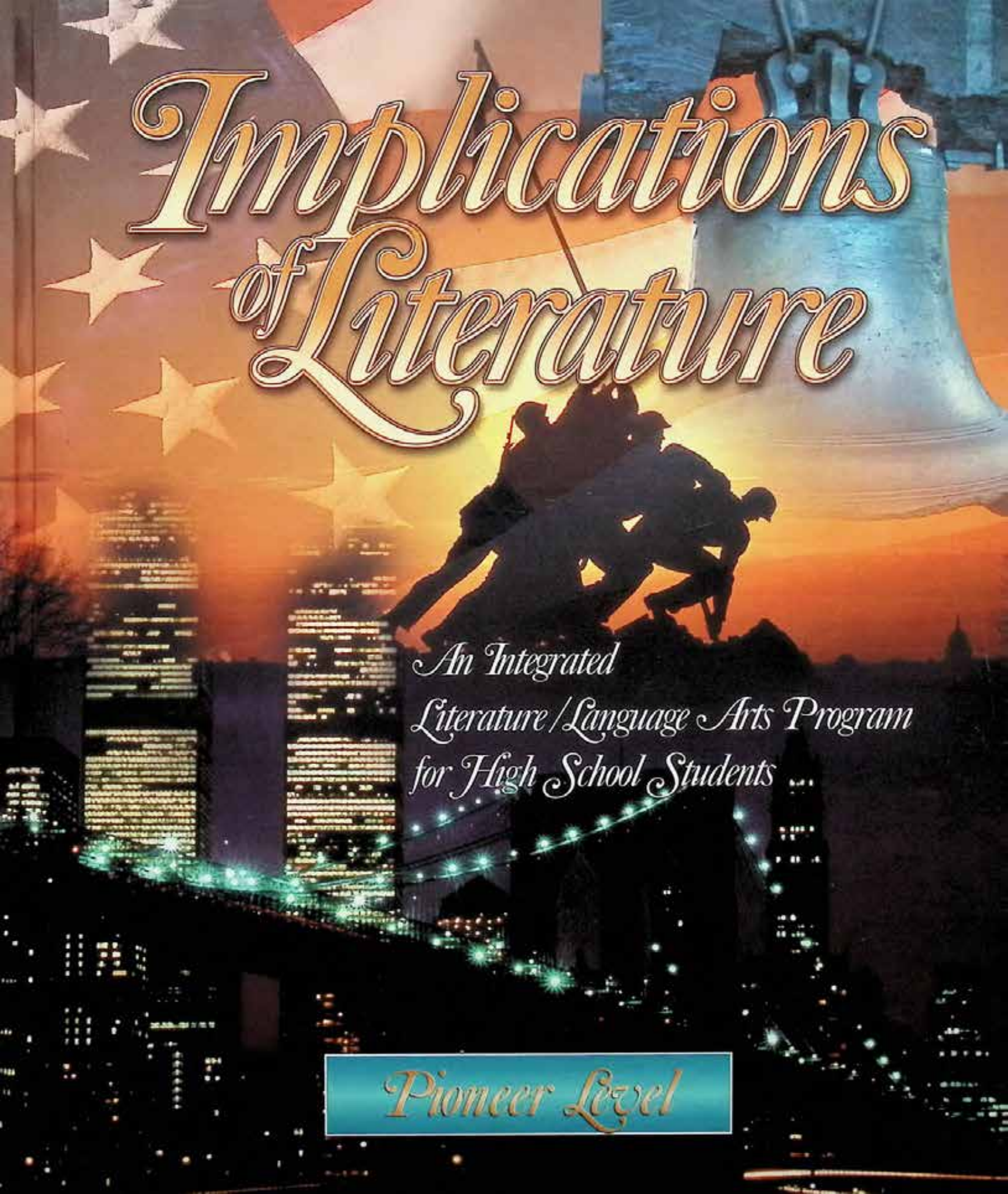
Implications of Literature
An Integrated Literature/Language Arts Program for High School Students ...
Pioneer Level

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Before You Read...

The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky

by Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

About the Author

Although Stephen Crane is best known for his Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, he was a serious journalist, poet, and short-story writer as well. Crane risked his life as a war correspondent in both the Greco-Turkish War and the Spanish-American War (1898). His poetry, such as "War is Kind," employed free verse and rendered him a pioneer of modern verse. He wrote many short stories and sketches. Whatever the genre, Crane often wrote compassionately about injustice and suffering, an attitude he acquired from his idealistic parents. Crane possessed the remarkable ability to write convincingly and powerfully, whether or not he had actually experienced the situations described. He was able to turn the events of his own hungry and penniless years into powerful realistic fiction, and he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* before he had ever witnessed a battle.

Crane is hailed as an important contributor to realism, an artistic movement that focuses on the details of everyday life. Although he died of tuberculosis at the age of 29 at the beginning of the 20th century, his writing is associated with the literary movements of the decades that follow.

About the Selection

Stephen Crane is a member of the school of psychological realism that focuses on human character and motivation rather than on plot. His works reflect an emphasis on human relationships under stress and employ vivid imagery and powerful figurative language. Common themes in Crane's works are feelings of sympathy and empathy as well as the need to override one's own needs in favor of the common good.

The spirit of the Old West, colorful and vibrant, leaps out of Crane's story. How does Crane manage to portray his characters so vividly? His masterful use of figurative language is an important ingredient in the story's success. Although this particular piece does not directly address brutal suffering or human cruelty, it does adhere to the tenets of realism in its attention to small detail. "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," with its delightful mingling of humor and suspense, is considered one of Crane's finest short stories.

The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky

Stephen Crane

Focus: Figurative Language

I

What does this description tell us about the character?

The great Pullman* was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that the plains of Texas were pouring eastward. Vast flats of green grass, dull-hued spaces of mesquite* and cactus, little groups of frame houses, woods of light and tender trees, all were sweeping into the east, sweeping over the horizon, a precipice.

A newly married pair had boarded this coach at San Antonio. The man's face was reddened from many days in the wind and sun, and a direct result of his new black clothes was that his brick-colored hands were constantly performing in a most conscious fashion. From time to time he looked down respectfully at his *attire*. He sat with a hand on each knee, like a man waiting in a barber's shop. The glances he devoted to other passengers were *furtive* and shy.

The bride was not very young. It was quite apparent that she had cooked, and that she was expected to cook, dutifully.

They were evidently very happy. "Ever been in a parlor-car before?" he asked, smiling with delight.

"No," she answered. "I never was. It's fine, ain't it?"



Helpful Definitions

Pullman — passenger train with a dining car and comfortable sleeping accommodations.

mesquite — thorny shrub common in the southwest.

"Great! And then after a while we'll go forward to the diner and get a big lay-out. Finest meal in the world. Charge a dollar."

"Oh, do they?" cried the bride. "Charge a dollar? Why, that's too much — for us — ain't it, Jack?"

"Not this trip, anyhow," he answered bravely. "We're going to go the whole thing."

Later, he explained to her about the trains. "You see, it's a thousand miles from one end of Texas to the other, and this train runs right across it and never stops but four times." He had the pride of an owner. He pointed out to her the dazzling fittings of the coach, and in truth her eyes opened wider as she contemplated the sea-green figured velvet,* the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil. At one end a bronze figure sturdily held a support for a separated chamber and at convenient places on the ceiling were frescoes* in olive and silver.

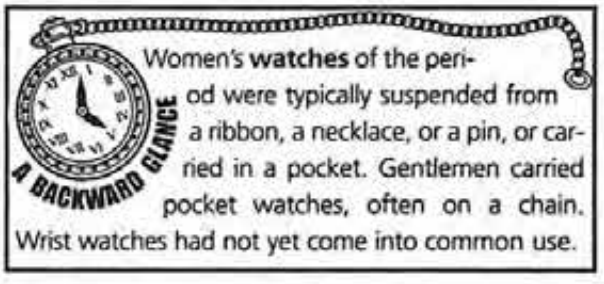
To the minds of the pair, their surroundings reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio. This was the environment of their new estate, and the man's face in particular beamed with an elation that made him appear ridiculous to the negro porter. This individual at times surveyed them from afar with an amused and superior grin. On other occasions he bullied them with skill in ways that did not make it exactly plain to them that they were being bullied. He subtly used all the manners of the most unconquerable kind of snobbery. He oppressed them, but of this oppression they had small knowledge, and they speedily forgot that infrequently a number of travelers covered them with stares of *derisive* enjoyment.

Why is the couple unaffected by the condescending attitude of those around them?

"We are due in Yellow Sky at 3.42," he said.

"Oh, are we?" she said, as if she had not been aware of it. To evince surprise at her husband's statement was part of her wifely *amiability*. She took from a pocket a little silver watch, and as she held it before her and stared at it with a frown of attention, the new husband's face shone.

Why isn't a dollar too much on "this trip"?



Women's **watches** of the period were typically suspended from a ribbon, a necklace, or a pin, or carried in a pocket. Gentlemen carried pocket watches, often on a chain. Wrist watches had not yet come into common use.

Why does his face shine as she checks the time?

"I bought it in San Anton' from a friend of mine," he told her gleefully.

At last they went to the dining-car. Two rows of negro waiters in glowing white suits surveyed their entrance with the interest and also the *equanimity* of men who had been forewarned. The pair fell to the lot of a waiter who happened to feel pleasure in steering them through their meal. He viewed them with the manner of a fatherly pilot, his countenance radiant with benevolence. The patronage entwined with the ordinary *deference* was not plain to them. And yet as they returned to their coach they showed in their faces a sense of escape.

Why does the beauty of the train seem particularly appropriate to the newly married couple?

How is the waiter's benevolence less than kind?

To the left, miles down a long purple slope, was a little ribbon of mist where moved the keening* Rio Grande.* The train was approaching it at an angle, and

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

figured velvet — embossed or patterned velvet.
frescoes — paintings done on moist plaster.
keening — wailing.
Rio Grande — river forming part of the border between the United States and Mexico.

the *apex* was Yellow Sky. Presently it was apparent that as the distance from Yellow Sky grew shorter, the husband became *commensurately* restless. His brick-red hands were more insistent in their prominence. Occasionally he was even rather absent-minded and far-away when the bride leaned forward and addressed him.

As a matter of truth, Jack Potter was beginning to find the shadow of a deed weigh upon him like a leaden slab. He, the town marshal of Yellow Sky, a man known, liked, and feared in his corner, a prominent person, had gone to San Antonio to meet a girl, and there, after the usual prayers, had actually induced her to marry him, without consulting Yellow Sky for any part of the transaction. He was now bringing his bride before an innocent and unsuspecting community.

What deed causes his feelings of guilt?

Of course, people in Yellow Sky married as it pleased them in accordance with a general custom; but such was Potter's thought of his duty to his friends, or of their idea of his duty, or of an unspoken form which does not control men in these matters, that he felt he was *heinous*. He had committed an extraordinary crime. Face to face with this girl in San Antonio, and spurred by his sharp impulse, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges. At San Antonio he was like a man hidden in the dark. A knife to sever any friendly duty, any form, was easy to his hand in that remote city. But the hour of Yellow Sky, the hour of daylight, was approaching.

What is the "unspoken form"?

He knew full well that his marriage was an important thing to his town. It could only be exceeded by the burning of the new hotel. His friends would not forgive him. Frequently he had reflected on the advisability of telling them by telegraph, but a new cowardice had been upon him. He feared to do it. And now the train was hurrying him toward a scene of amazement, glee, reproach. He glanced out of the window at the line of haze swinging slowly in toward the train.

Yellow Sky had a kind of brass band which played painfully to the delight of the populace. He laughed without heart as he thought of it. If the citizens could dream of his prospective arrival with his bride, they would parade the band at the station and escort them, amid cheers and laughing congratulations, to his adobe* home.

He resolved that he would use all the devices of speed and plains-craft* in making the journey from the station to his house. Once within that safe citadel,* he could issue some sort of a vocal bulletin, and then not go among the citizens until they had time to wear off a little of their enthusiasm.

The bride looked anxiously at him. "What's worrying you, Jack?"

He laughed again. "I'm not worrying, girl. I'm only thinking of Yellow Sky."

A sense of mutual guilt invaded their minds. The traitor to the feelings of Yellow Sky narrowly watched the speeding landscape. "We're nearly there," he said.



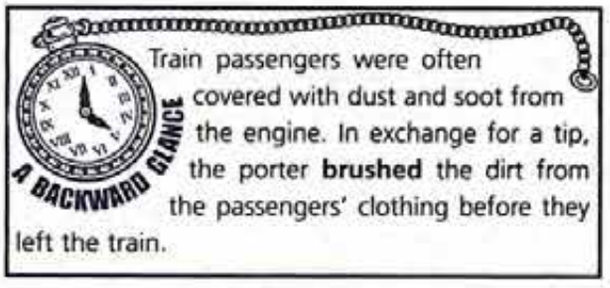
A CLOSER LOOK

Appropriately for a Western story, Crane uses a metaphor based on horseback riding: **spurred** — driven on — by his impulse, he went **headlong** — jumped recklessly — over the social **hedges** — the obstacles — in his way. The marshal has overcome his perceived social obligations and married without notifying his community.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

adobe — building material of sun-dried earth and straw.
plains-craft — the specialized knowledge of an expert tracker.
citadel — fortress.

Presently the porter came and announced the proximity of Potter's home. He held a brush in his hand and, with all his airy superiority gone, he brushed Potter's new clothes as the latter slowly turned this way and that way. Potter fumbled out a coin and gave it to the porter as he had seen others do. It was a heavy and muscle-bound business, as that of a man shoeing his first horse.



Train passengers were often covered with dust and soot from the engine. In exchange for a tip, the porter **brushed** the dirt from the passengers' clothing before they left the train.

The porter took their bag, and as the train began to slow they moved forward to the hooded platform of the car. Presently the two engines and their long string of coaches rushed into the station of Yellow Sky.

"They have to take water here," said Potter, from a constricted throat and in mournful cadence as one announcing death. Before the train stopped his eye had swept the length of the platform, and he was glad and astonished to see there was none upon it but the station-agent, who, with a slightly hurried and anxious air, was walking toward the water-tanks. When the train had halted, the porter alighted first and placed in position a little temporary step.

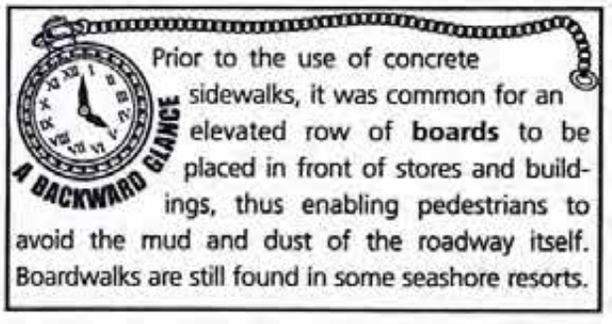
"Come on, girl," said Potter hoarsely. As he helped her down they each laughed on a false note. As they slunk rapidly away, his hang-dog glance perceived that they were unloading the two trunks, and also that the station-agent far ahead near the baggage-car had turned and was running toward him, making gestures. He laughed, and groaned as he laughed, when he noted the first effect of his marital bliss upon Yellow Sky. He motioned to his wife and they fled. Behind them the porter stood chuckling *fatuously*.

Why does Potter laugh?

II

The California Express on the Southern Railway was due at Yellow Sky in twenty-one minutes. There were six men at the bar of the Weary Gentleman saloon. One was a drummer* who talked a great deal and rapidly; three were Texans who did not care to talk at that time; and two were Mexican sheep-herders who did not talk as a general practice in the Weary Gentleman saloon. The bar-keeper's dog lay on the boardwalk that crossed in front of the door. His head was on his paws, and he glanced drowsily here and there with the constant *vigilance* of a dog that is kicked on occasion. Across the sandy street were some vivid green grass plots, so wonderful in appearance amid the sands that burned near them in a blazing sun that they caused a doubt in the mind. They exactly resembled the grass mats used to represent lawns on the stage. At the cooler end

How are the customers in the saloon characterized?



Prior to the use of concrete sidewalks, it was common for an elevated row of **boards** to be placed in front of stores and buildings, thus enabling pedestrians to avoid the mud and dust of the roadway itself. Boardwalks are still found in some seashore resorts.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

drummer — a traveling salesman.

of the railway station a man without a coat sat in a tilted chair and smoked his pipe. The fresh-cut bank of the Rio Grande circled near the town, and there could be seen beyond it a great plum-colored plain of mesquite.

Save for the busy drummer and his companions in the saloon, Yellow Sky was dozing. The new-comer leaned gracefully upon the bar, and recited many tales with the confidence of a bard* who has come upon a new field.

" — and at the moment that the old man fell down stairs with the bureau in his arms, the old woman was coming up with two scuttles* of coal, and, of course — "

The drummer's tale was interrupted by a young man who suddenly appeared in the open door. He cried: "Scratchy Wilson's drunk, and has turned loose with both hands." The two Mexicans at once set down their glasses and faded out of the rear entrance of the saloon.

What is the immediate effect of the young man's words?

The drummer, innocent and *jocular*, answered: "All right, old man. S'pose he has. Come in and have a drink, anyhow."

Why does the drummer continue to ask so many questions?

But the information had made such an obvious cleft* in every skull in the room that the drummer was obliged to see its importance. All had become instantly *morose*. "Say," said he, mystified, "what is this?" His three companions made the introductory gesture of eloquent speech, but the young man at the door forestalled* them.

Is this statement meant to be taken literally? Explain.

"It means, my friend," he answered, as he came into the saloon, "that for the next two hours this town won't be a health resort."

The bar-keeper went to the door and locked and barred it. Reaching out of the window, he pulled in heavy wooden shutters and barred them. Immediately a solemn, chapel-like gloom was upon the place. The drummer was looking from one to another.

"But say," he cried, "what is this, anyhow? You don't mean there is going to be a gun-fight?"

"Don't know whether there'll be a fight or not," answered one man grimly. "But there'll be some shootin' — some good shootin'."

The young man who had warned them waved his hand. "Oh, there'll be a fight fast enough, if anyone wants it. Anybody can get a fight out there in the street. There's a fight just waiting."

The drummer seemed to be swayed between the interest of a foreigner and a perception of personal danger.

"What did you say his name was?" he asked.

"Scratchy Wilson," they answered in chorus.

"And will he kill anybody? What are you going to do? Does this happen often? Does he *rampage* around like this once a week or so? Can he break in that door?"

"No, he can't break down that door," replied the bar-keeper. "He's tried it three times. But when he comes you'd better lay down on the floor, stranger. He's dead sure to shoot at it, and a bullet may come through."

Thereafter the drummer kept a strict eye upon the door. The time had not yet been called for him to hug the floor, but as a minor precaution he *sidled* near to the wall. "Will he kill anybody?" he said again.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

bard — a traveling minstrel; one who sings ballads or recites poetry.
scuttles — deep scoops used to carry coal from the coalbin to the fireplace.
cleft — a split; here, a tremendous impact.
forestalled — prevented by prior action.



Literary Critique

1. A character's personality can be greatly altered by his surroundings. Crane reveals Jack Potter's character set against two very different backdrops. What are they? How does he conduct himself against each backdrop?
2. Crane does not name his main character immediately. Why not? The bride, important enough to find herself in the story's title, is never named at all. Why do you think this is so?
3. In the description of Scratchy Wilson's rampage, Crane uses a good deal of **personification**. Find two examples. Why is this form of figurative language particularly suitable for the drunkard?
4. Consider the mood of the story. Is the tone meant to inspire fear or to amuse? How can you tell?
5. How does the confrontation between Potter and Scratchy end? What brings about the conclusion? Did you anticipate this conclusion? Why or why not?



Writing Workshop

In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," a heated conflict is resolved in a surprising way. Think of a problem or difficult situation you or someone you know has encountered. Try to think of one or more innovative ways the problem or situation could have been better handled. In a three-to-four-paragraph personal essay, state the problem and present possible solutions.



Journal Workshop

The title character, Potter's bride, is thrust into an unexpected situation, but her reactions are not overtly stated in the text. Create a journal entry in which you express the bride's feelings as she watches the confrontation between Potter and Scratchy Wilson.



Language Arts Workshop

1. Crane makes potent use of imagery to tell his tale. Read each quotation below. What does the author mean to convey? Replace each simile with a comparison of your own, mirroring the original idea of the author. Example: At San Antonio he was like a man hidden in the dark. At San Antonio he was one raindrop in a storm of humanity. (Both sentences emphasize his anonymity.)
   a. He walked with the creeping movement of a midnight cat.
   b. Immediately a solemn, chapel-like gloom was upon the place.
   c. The bar-keeper, moving like a ghost, handed him a glass and a bottle.

2. Crane's masterful use of figurative language breathes color and life into his story. Match each item in the list below to the simile Crane uses to describe it.

a. Scratchy's manipulation of his weapons	1. As yellow as old cloth
b. The face of the bride when she and her husband encounter Scratchy	2. Like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world
c. Potter's posture on the train	3. Worked like a pump
d. Scratchy's throat muscles as he deals with his rage	4. Easy as straws
e. The wood furnishings of the Pullman	5. Like a man waiting in the barber shop
f. Scratchy, upon noticing Potter's new wife	6. As that of a man shoeing his first horse
g. Potter's inexperience in tipping the porter	7. As darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil

VOCABULARY BANK

amiability apex attire balm commensurately deference derisive epithets equanimity fatuously furtive heinous imperturbable jocular lithely morose peremptory rampage sidled vigilance

Exercises for the words in the Vocabulary Bank can be found on page 743.



Before You Read...

The Use of Force

by William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

About the Author

Though educated in Europe, William Carlos Williams spent most of his adult life as a practicing pediatrician in his hometown of Rutherford, New Jersey. By 1909, Williams began to publish his poetry and prose; he was recognized as a keen observer of American life and a brilliant transcriber of American speech and **idioms**.

His stress on the simple realities of daily American life set him apart from his more complex American literary contemporaries whose works were filled with complex allusions to art, religion, history, and other languages. Thus, Williams' clear prose and poetry, like the works of Mark Twain, reflect the simpler, straightforward viewpoint of the average American.

Williams' prose and poetry now fill thirty-seven volumes. In 1963, he was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Since World War II, Williams' influence on subsequent generations of poets has been strong, as they followed his example by seeking clearer forms of language to express their own fresh visions of reality.

About the Selection

Williams' work reexamines standard literary forms to create fresh viewpoints and clearer writing formats. He intentionally eliminates quotation marks in the dialogue between different characters; this technique forces the reader to read the text very carefully to separate the exposition from the dialogue.

The dominant themes in Williams' works are clarity, objectivity, and authority; these themes also parallel early 20th-century science. As a physician, Williams' first principle is clarity, because a doctor must be able to observe his/her patient with a clear eye. As a writer, Williams uses his trained scientific eye to examine the human reality of daily life around him. Thus, as both a writer and a doctor, Williams seeks clarity through "theaters of proof." As a final result, both the poet and medical practitioner find the truth through clarity of understanding; he uses the scalpel of precise language to express his themes, and he employs scientific processes to diagnose and treat his patients' ailments.

The story centers on a physician who is making a house call at the home of a poor immigrant family. In the course of examining the young patient, the doctor and the child enter into a battle of wills. This battle of wills introduces the reader to the literary focus, the **extended metaphor**.