How does Bierce's use of foreshadowing contribute to the meaning of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"?



In this lesson you will learn how to discern the impact of an author's structural choices by analyzing examples of foreshadowing in a text.



Let's Review

AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

by

Ambrose Bierce

THE MILLENNIUM FULCRUM EDITION, 1988

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the ties supporting the rails of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners-two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest-a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it. Short story by Ambrose Bierce

• Main Character-Peyton Farquhar

 Tricks us into thinking escape is real

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Let's Review

Foreshadowing-author gives us details earlier in the text that hint at what will happen later in the text





- Reread portions of the text and highlight key words and phrases that hint at something that will come later.
- 2 In the margins of your text or on a sticky note, explain how these words and phrases are connected to events that come later in the text.
 - 3 Ask yourself: "How do these examples of foreshadowing contribute to the meaning of the story?" LEARN ZILLION

Core Lesson 1 Reread portions of the text and highlight key words and phrases that hint at something that will come later.

These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgement as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

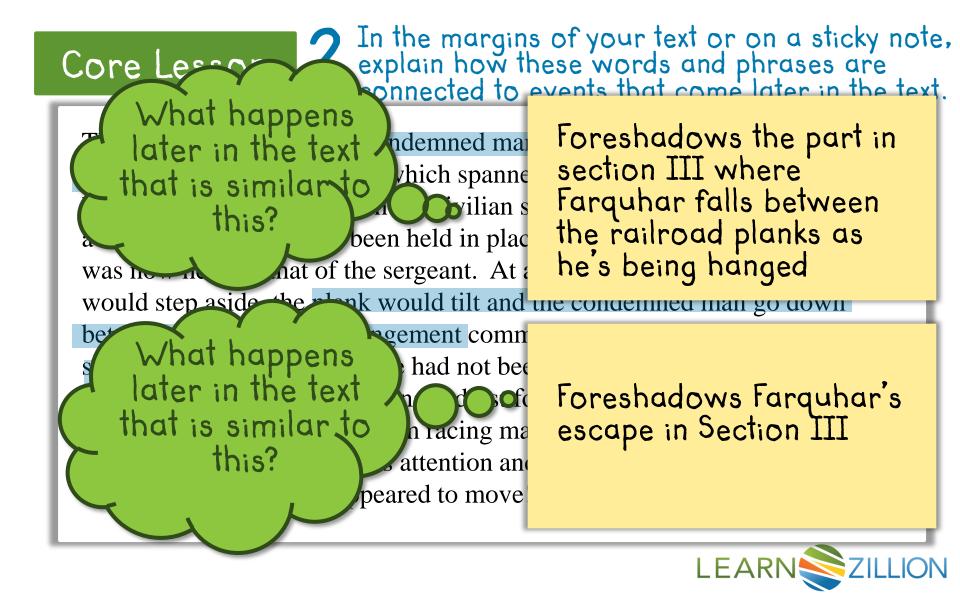
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Just as Farquhar is tricked by the Federal scout, we, as readers, are tricked by Bierce into thinking his escape is real when it isn't.

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How does Bierce's use of foreshadowing contribute to the meaning of the story?

There are several examples of foreshadowing in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" that build tension and suspense. The reader wants to know what will happen at the end of the story. One example of foreshadowing is in section I where Farquhar stares down at the stream below him and sees the driftwood. This

foreshadows Farquhar's apparent escape in section III. Another example of foreshadowing is in section II where we learn that Farquhar has been tricked by a Federal scout. This foreshadows the end of the story where Farquhar dies from hanging. In order to strengthen his message, Bierce tricks his readers just

as the Federal scout Tricked Farquhar.



- 1 Reread portions of the text and highlight key words and phrases that hint at the outcome of the text.
- 2 In the margins of your text or on a sticky note, explain how these words and phrases are connected to events that come later in the text.
 - 3 Ask yourself: "How do these examples of foreshadowing contribute to the meaning of the story?" LEARN ZILLION

In this lesson you have learned how to discern the impact of an author's structural choices by analyzing examples of foreshadowing in a text.

