

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



## Let's Review

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



## Core Lesson

- 1 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?”

## 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!

## Core Lesson

1

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

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

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text?

## Core Lesson

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.

What happens later in the text that is similar to this?

Foreshadows the part in section III where Farquhar falls between the railroad planks as he's being hanged

What happens later in the text that is similar to this?

Foreshadows Farquhar's escape in Section III



## Core Lesson

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.

The lady had not  
thanked her ceremony  
hour later, after night  
the direction of

What happens  
later in the text  
that is similar to  
this?

Foreshadows the very  
ending of the story.

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.

Farquhar  
how  
, are  
nd of

## Core Lesson

3

Ask yourself: “How do these examples of foreshadowing contribute to the meaning of the story?”

Foreshadow  
part in sect  
where Far  
between  
planks  
hanger



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## Core Lesson

# 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.

## Core Lesson

- 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?”

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how to discern the impact of  
an author's structural choices  
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