How does Bierce’s use of point of view affect our understanding of “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”? 
In this lesson you will learn how the point of view affects the meaning of the story by identifying when a narrator is reliable and when he is unreliable.
AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

by

Ambrose Bierce

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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.
Let's Review

Point of view: how author allows readers to experience the action of the story

- First person
- Third person limited
- Third person omniscient
Core Lesson

1. Reread portions of the text and highlight words or phrases that help you to understand who the narrator is.

2. Using highlighted evidence, ask yourself: “What point of view is this?”

3. Ask yourself: “Why does the author use this point of view?”
Core Lesson 1

Reread portions of the text and highlight words or phrases that help you to understand who the narrator is.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!
Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forwards with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!
Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

Farquhar, the soldier; Farquhar’s wife).
Core Lesson 2 Using highlighted evidence, ask yourself: “What point of view is this?”

Is the narrator talking about himself? Is he following one character? Does he know what’s going on with ALL the characters?

This is third person limited because it is focused only on Farquhar and what he does, says, and feels.
Core Lesson 2 Using highlighted evidence, ask yourself: “What point of view is this?”

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep. For now he sees another scene—perhaps he is delirious. He starts all bright and beautiful, the entire night. He walks, he sees a sweet, cool and sweeter light on the steps she shed all about him with a sound like the shock of matchless grace forwards with extended arms. As a stunning blow upon the back of the darkness and silence!

This is third person limited because it is focused only on Farquhar and what he does, says, and feels.
Core Lesson

2 Using highlighted evidence, ask yourself: “What point of view is this?”

This is third person omniscient because Farquhar himself couldn’t report that he is dead.

This is something that only an omniscient (all-knowing) narrator could tell us.
Ask yourself: “Why does the author use this point of view?”

The third person limited point of view narrator is unreliable. It tricks the reader into thinking the escape was real.

The third person omniscient narrator was reliable. It revealed the truth about Farquhar’s death by hanging.
How does Bierce's use of point of view affect our understanding of “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”?

Bierce uses two different points of view in the last three paragraphs of “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”.

The first two of those three paragraphs use third person limited to explain how Farquhar feels and what he does as he gets closer to home and sees his wife waiting for him.

The last paragraph uses third person omniscient to explain that Farquhar is really dead and that his body is hanging from the Owl Creek Bridge.

Bierce changes the point of view in the last paragraph to create a surprise ending. The reader is caught up in what Farquhar sees and how he feels as he reaches home and runs towards his wife. Just when the reader expects him to hug his wife, the last paragraph jerks the reader into reality. The omniscient narrator reveals that Farquhar is actually dead and his escape was not real. The narrator in the first two of these three paragraphs is not believable and the narrator of the last paragraph is.
Core Lesson

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2. Using highlighted evidence, ask yourself: “What point of view is this?”

3. Ask yourself: “Why does the author use this point of view?”
In this lesson you have learned how the point of view affects the meaning of the story by identifying when a narrator is reliable and when he is unreliable.