Concept/Vocabulary Analysis

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English 378
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May 9, 2004

Literary Text:  The Red Badge of Courage
By Stephen Crane
Organizational Patterns:
The book is divided in three main parts, containing 24 chapters, taking place during the American Civil War.

- Part 1 shows the main character, Henry, as an average upstate New York farm boy, who has imagined war as a glorious thing. He enlists in the Union forces to become a hero like the ancient Greeks he has read about in school.
- In Part two, Henry discovers that war is not what he had dreamed it would be and the reader participates in his psychological struggle as he seeks to overcome his fear.
- Part 3 shows Henry’s newfound manhood and portrays him as self-assured and confident, something he had lacked during his struggles in Parts 1 and 2. The peace and valor he discovers is far different from the Greek-like heroes he had first imagined through his books.

Issues Related to the Study of Literature:

Theme-
- Fear: When it comes time to participate in the war Henry’s emotions become confused. He had idealized images of war and heroism and could not figure out how to reconcile reality with his imaginations. Henry experiences true fear and deserts his regiment during battle.
- Maturation or coming-of-age: Crane’s characters are mostly nameless and faceless. In fact, Henry is most often referred to as “The Youthful Soldier” or “The Youth”. Throughout the story, Henry matures and understands that reality does not need to match his idealizations. Through the process of overcoming his fears, Henry finds confidence, which he labels as true manhood.
- Peer Pressure: Rumors play a large role throughout the story. These rumors lead to different reactions among the soldiers and begin Henry’s questioning process. At the story’s beginning, Henry is particularly susceptible to peer pressure, but as he matures and becomes a man, he no longer follows the crowd and even becomes a leader.

Setting-
American Civil War. Although it is never mentioned in The Red Badge of Courage, Crane mentions in the book's sequel, The Veteran, that the setting for Red Badge of Courage takes place during the battle of Chancellorsville, VA. The battle took place May 2–6, 1863 involving the forces of General Joseph Hooker for the Union (Northern) Army and General Robert E. Lee for the Confederate (Southern) Army.

Point of View, Narrative Voice-
The narrative voice is third-person limited omniscient point of view. The narrator knows everything concerning Henry; all his thoughts, feelings, and actions which may be related to the reader, or they may be withheld. The reader never knows any other characters from the inside.

Example:
"He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part - a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country - was in crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from a hand." Chapter 5, pg. 25

Tone-
In writing The Red Badge of Courage, Crane drew on a pattern of the time used in Civil War memoirs and novels of initiation. Terms used to describe this tone are detached, realistic, and journalistic. However, what Crane created was not an ordinary Civil War story. Most war novels by American writers at the time were adventure stories or romances (ex- Gone with the Wind). Crane gave a realistic portrayal of war and focused on the psychological effects of war. Crane himself called the novel a “psychological portrayal of fear.”

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Symbols-
- The red badge - The red badge, a bloodstain, was a symbol of courage for other soldiers, however, for Henry, it becomes a sign of cowardice since he received his from a fight with another union soldier after deserting.
- The flag - The flag carried during battle is a sign of an army’s place in the battle. It also displayed the courage of the person who had to carry it since the flag bearer must always stand at the front lines.
- The dead soldier- Henry encounters the dead soldier, decaying and covered by ants, at a crucial moment: he has just reassured himself that he was right to desert his regiment and that the welfare of the army depends upon soldiers being wise enough to preserve them. Then the dead soldier forces Henry to begin to question himself and his values.

Irony-
Crane’s realistic descriptions of battle and attitude concerning bravery and war show irony by calling into question the traditional view of war as a glorious scene of heroics and bravery. Crane’s attitude toward his main character may be seen as ironic. His descriptions of Henry make the reader question Henry’s perceptions about himself.

Affective Issues Related to the Work:
Vocabulary:
There are many vocabulary terms readers may not be familiar with. It would be worthwhile to spend time focusing on definitions as well as examples of vivid language found in the text.

(The following list comes from The Glencoe Literature Library. http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/red_badge_of_courage.pdf)

- Annihilate v. to totally destroy
- Ardor n. burning passion
- Din n. loud, jarring noise
- Fathom v. to understand; to probe
- Ominous adj. forecasting disaster or threat
- Prowess n. bravery and skill
- Solemnly adv. seriously
- Tumult n. uproar; disorder
- Conjure v. to think up
- Derisive adj. scornful
- Frenzy n. wild or violent activity
- Gaunt adj. excessively thin
- Plight n. unfortunate situation
- Spectral adj. ghostly
- Sullenly adv. gloomily; with silent anger
- Transfixed adj. held motionless
- Valor n. bravery
- Vindication n. justification; confirmation
- Clamor n. noisy shouting
- Delirium n. confused or excited mental state
- Despondent adj. depressed; hopeless
- Frantic adj. emotionally out of control
- Gospels n. things taken to be the truth
- Lurid adj. shockingly pale; horrifying

Background Knowledge:
Students should begin with study of the author, Stephen Crane, to build a foundation for understanding and interpreting his literary style and meanings. Historical and social knowledge about the American Civil War era is advisable, but more important is an understanding of weapons and battle tactics used during the war. A brief overview of Greek heroics could help students understand what Henry expected war to be like and why he was disappointed when he experienced it in reality rather than fiction. It would help to draw connections from the Civil War to current wars the students are more familiar with.

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Implications for Students of Diversity:
Because the book deals with the American Civil War, the topic of slavery may be a controversial issue for many students. Students from other countries may have a difficult time understanding the issues contributing to the American Civil War. The idea of what it means to “be a man” may vary according to student’s backgrounds. Students of diverse backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and races should understand the themes the book deals with because everyone, in one form or another, experiences these themes. Topic for discussion could include fear, war, cowardice, peer pressure, gender issues, slavery, and the idea of adulthood.

Gender Issues:
All the main characters, and the majority of secondary characters, are male which could prove to be an interesting, and perhaps difficult, point of discussion. A historical understanding of the time period will help answer questions and concerns regarding this issue. The psychological and emotional journey Henry makes throughout the novel may be recognized and applied to real-life situations by both genders.

The Central Question/Enduring Issue:
- Self-discovery. What Henry learns, and whether he actually learns, from his experiences is a point that is still debated.
- Fear. Crane himself called the novel a “psychological portrayal of fear.”

Research Issues/Project Ideas:
- Have students work with a partner to create a list of challenging or stressful situations that test a person’s character. They could include categories such as school, sports, work, or family situations. Students should discuss their examples. What could people discover about themselves in each situation?
- Employers often evaluate the performance of their employees in a report, which is then shared with the employee as feedback. Both positive comments and suggestions for improvement are usually included. Students should pretend they are Henry’s commanding officer and evaluate his performance during the first attack (see Chapter 5). In their written report, they should give specific examples of behaviors that they feel deserve praise or criticism. Based on this performance only, students should evaluate whether Henry has the potential to be a good soldier.
- Students should use a half sheet of poster board to create a collage that depicts either the scene from the book that they feel was most memorable or the central question/enduring issue. They should use both words and pictures.
- Students should pretend they are one of the soldiers who survive the battles in The Red Badge of Courage. Students should write a letter to a family member who has never seen a military battle before and describe their experiences.

Informational/Functional Texts:
- Maps of the battle of Chancellorville, VA.
- Journals or other primary documents about battles of the Civil War.
- Pictures of soldiers from the Civil War.
- A non-fiction article about the psychology of fear.
- Clips from a movie made about the book to help with visualization.
- Newspaper articles about a current war to compare/contrast.
- Picture books about the Civil War.