

"It makes you think long and hard about what it means to fight in a war, especially when you're not quite sure whose war it is." Dwayne, 13



THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

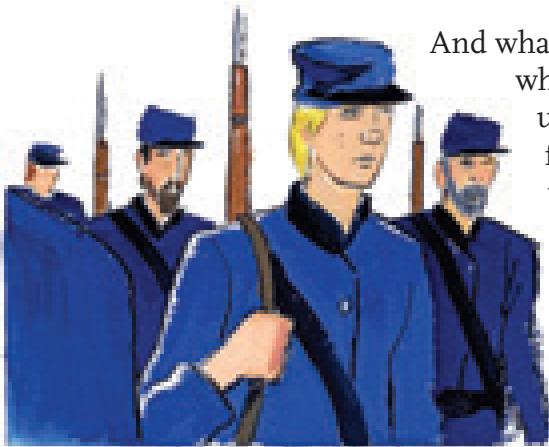
STEPHEN CRANE

Henry Fleming leaves his widowed mother behind and marches off to join a war that is tearing his country apart.

His regiment has yet to be tested in the fire of battle. Together the soldiers wait while distant guns rumble and the lights of enemy campfires flicker on the hills beyond a darkened river.

The young man recalls his childhood dreams of valiant combat. Will he pass the test and return home to tell others of his triumphs on the battlefield? Or will he flee at the first sign of real danger?

And what of his fellow soldiers, whose lives are caught up with his once the fighting begins? Will they examine the young man for any sign of real courage – or will he slink away in shame?



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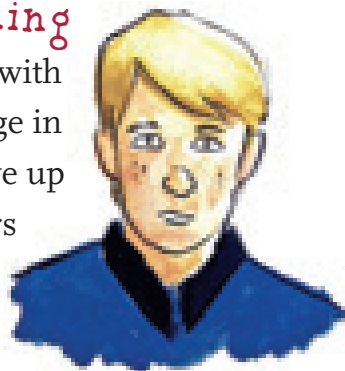
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THE CHARACTERS

Henry Fleming

Henry has grown up with dreams of valour and courage in the thick of battle. Will he live up to these ideals when he enters the battlefield himself to fight for the Union?



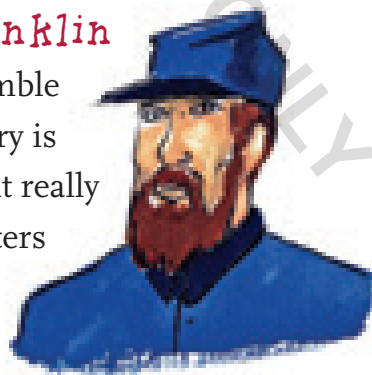
Henry's mother

Mrs Fleming seems to be matter-of-fact about her son's departure to war, but is she hiding a powerful sense of fear?



Jim Conklin

The 'tall soldier', Jim is humble and good-natured. Henry is present at Jim's death; is it really Jim's ghost that he encounters some time later?



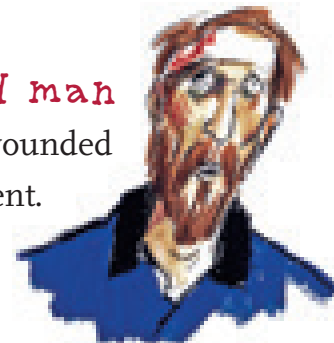
Wilson

The 'loud soldier', Wilson is quarrelsome and boastful. Will the experience of battle change his character?



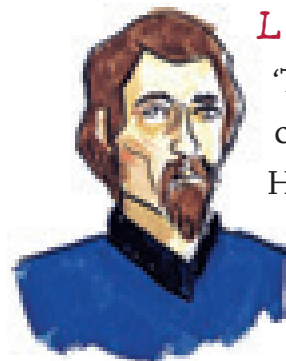
The tattered man

Henry meets this wounded soldier far away from his own regiment. Will the tattered soldier still help if he learns Henry's secret?



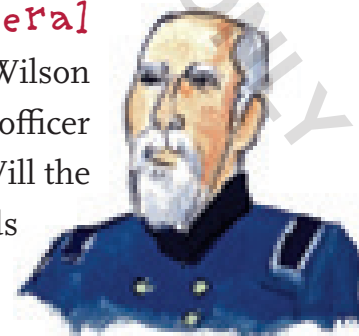
Lieutenant Hasbrouk

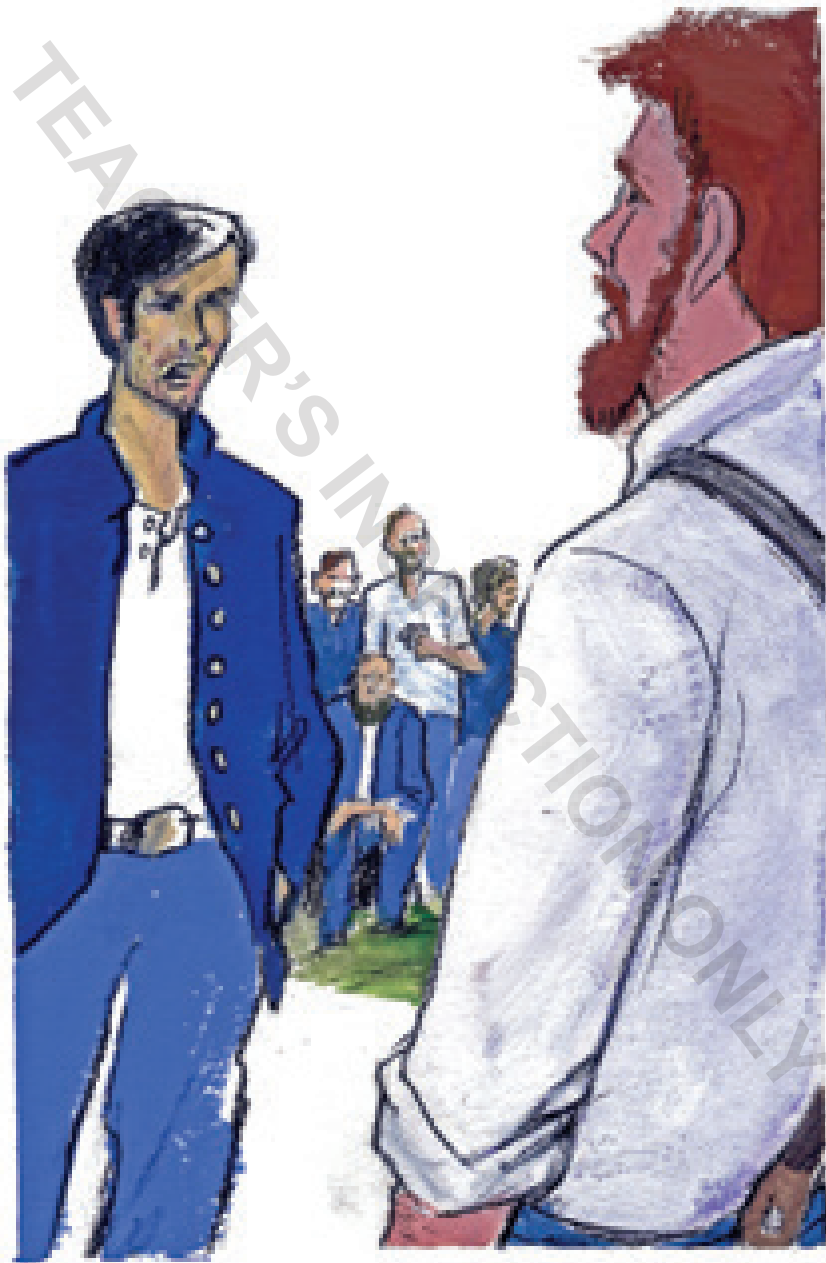
'The lieutenant' is a young officer in charge of Henry and his fellow soldiers. He swears constantly in battle – is he angry with his men or simply urging them to fight bravely?



The General

Henry and Wilson overhear this high-ranking officer insulting his regiment. Will the general have to eat his words when the fighting finishes?





THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

The early morning sun thinned the cold fog to reveal an army resting on hills above a river. As the landscape brightened from brown to green, the army awakened. The sound of rumours was everywhere.

A tall soldier returned from the river with a freshly-washed shirt to announce some news that he had received on good account – a reliable friend had heard it from a trustworthy cavalryman who had heard it from his own brother at division headquarters.

‘We’re goin’ t’ move tomorrah – sure,’ he told a group along a muddy, makeshift street. ‘Upriver an’ behind ’em.’

He went on to outline an elaborate plan of a brilliant campaign. The blue-clothed Union soldiers settled in small groups to consider the news. One young private took issue with the reporter. With a flushed face and hands thrust into his trouser pockets, he retorted loudly.

‘It’s a lie – that’s all it is, a thunderin’ lie! This army ain’t movin’. I’ve heard the same thing eight times in the past two weeks, and we ain’t moved yet.’

Another called the tall soldier to account.
‘Jim, how yeh know this is true?’

‘Well, yeh kin b’lieve me er not, jest as yeh like. I don’t care a hang.’

A youthful private listened to the exchanges with interest. Then he squeezed into his hut through a hole that served as a door. Inside he stretched out on a wide bunk in order to consider some new thoughts that had come to him.

The youth was astonished. So they were at last going to fight the rebels. He had dreamed of battles all his life – of bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. But surely the age of glorious war was over. Men now were too good, or too timid, to test themselves in such fire.



He had burned to enlist, but his mother had found hundreds of good reasons for him to stay away from the fighting. The youth could find no real reply to any of them, but still the pressure to join grew louder – from newspapers, from shouting in the streets, from his own thoughts.

One evening he had told his mother that he had decided to join. ‘Henry, don’t be a fool,’ was her only reply. The next morning he went into town, enlisted in a company that was forming there, and returned to the farm in soldier’s clothes, glowing with anticipation.

‘The Lord’s will be done,’ his mother said, and returned to milking the cows.

With a calm sadness she prepared things for the youth on his way to war. ‘I’ve knet yeh eight pairs of socks, Henry, and I’ve put in all yer best shirts, because I want my boy to be jest as warm and comf’able as anybody in the army. An’ allus be careful an’ choose yer comp’ny. There’s lots of bad men in the army, Henry.

- After hearing the regiment described as ‘mule drivers’ and then criticised even after they had overpowered the enemy, Henry decides that the best revenge would be for other officers to see his bleeding body on the battlefield after the next engagement.
- Henry watches several rebel prisoners that they have captured after the last battle. One of them swears at his captors and another chats easily with the Union soldiers. But Henry’s attention is on a silent prisoner, whose face seems eaten up with a powerful sense of shame.

Back in time

The Red Badge of Courage is set during the American Civil War (1861–65). Divisions between northern and southern states had been building ever since the United States declared its independence from Great Britain in 1776.

Most disputes centred on the issue of slavery. Southern farmers bought and sold African-Americans as slaves to work on large cotton and tobacco farms. They resisted moves by northern states to limit or end slavery in the United States.

In 1861, eleven southern states declared their independence and called themselves the Confederate States of America.

This action triggered a civil war in which Americans took sides against other Americans. Union soldiers from the northern states fought to preserve the United States as a country that would still have northern and southern states. Confederate (or ‘rebel’) soldiers fought equally hard to preserve what they saw as the Southern way of life, and to protect their land from northern ‘invaders’.

In the end, the Union side – with its greater population and more advanced industry – was victorious. But more than 600,000 soldiers died during the four-year war, nearly as many as in all other wars involving American soldiers. Most of the fighting was in the swamps and forests of the South, with many troops becoming lost or trapped in the confusion of battle.

Stephen Crane based his novel on accounts of the Battle of Chancellorsville, fought in May 1863. At the time, it was hailed as a great Confederate (rebel) victory. But by the time