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## Reader's Guide

This reader's guide will help the student to gain insight into the story. Our enjoyment and benefit from reading is increased as we learn to artfully analyze and accurately evaluate what we read. As Christians, we also want to apply the perceptiveness and wisdom of God's Word to the things we read. Four areas are developed.

### **Identity and Characterization** - The Questioning of Youth

Almost everyone can recall the uncertainties of youth. Whether handled on theoretical ground in school, or on real and practical turf, the psychological hurdles were often very hard. Being untested we didn't have much experience on which to fall back. Questioning our own adequacy and determination sometimes became epidemic. In any case it seemed worse than it was.

One way in which we could deal with life's challenges was to engage in fantasy. We would compose daydreams in which we pictured ourselves in a heroic or winning role. A bit of this kind of reverie may be good, in that it provides some relief from imagined anxiety and fear. If it sidetracks us and prevents real progress and involvement, then it is not good.

*Red Badge* is about this youthful struggle. The author gives us an intimate view of the inner thoughts of the main character, Henry Fleming. His personal search for his own identity and purpose forms the main part of the story.

Christian young people usually experience this search for a personal concept, just as surely as those who are without faith in Christ. Few children know for sure how they will react under the extreme conditions of battle or other kinds of violence. Few can predict exactly how they will respond to powerful temptation, disaster, or other trial and testing.

A Christian's question might be, instead of "Who am I?" more appropriately, "What does God want me to be?" "Am I going to be able to meet His expectation and call when the time comes?" Perhaps with the young Psalmist, David, a believer would face the cold slap of reality by learning to use the cries for help found in the Book of the Psalms. In either case, the struggle would still be very difficult, if not shattering, at least for a time.

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## **Images and Irony**

The reader should always watch for *word-paintings*. On the first page, for example we read about the “river, amber-tinted in the shadow of its banks” and about the night watch, “the stream had become of a sorrowful blackness” over which one could see the “red, eyelike gleam of hostile campfires . . .” This illustration reveals the superiority of reading good books over watching television and other entertainments. Our minds are exercised to create the vision that is prompted by the author. We are “involved” and caught up in the story.

Imagine the night before your first battle. The “red eyes” of the enemy monster glowing out of the menacing night, across a strange river of unknown depth and current.

Watch for three kinds of images that give energy to the writing. 1) *literal descriptive* images, 2) *figurative* images, metaphors and similes that spark our imaginations in a mysterious or romantic way, and 3) *symbolic* images that express feeling.

Another feature of the book is *irony*. Ironic writing usually contains three elements: a contradiction or inconsistency, the recognition by the reader of this contradiction or inconsistency, and a resulting ridicule or mockery connected with the words.

Recognition of irony often depends on the experience and insight of the reader. It is something we gradually develop as we study and are exposed to an increasing number of authors.

## **Vocabulary**

Note words that you have not seen before. Note, as well, those words that are from a dialect or a kind of slang that is appropriate to the situation. In order to understand many words and terms it will require an active imagination and the careful analysis of the context.

## **Context and Background**

The Battle of Chancellorsville, during the spring of 1863.

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### **The Author: A *Brief Sketch***

Stephen Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* when he was twenty-two years old. It was published in 1895. Crane died, in 1900, of tuberculosis when he was twenty-eight.

One reason this book was a success from the time of its publication is that it portrayed war as it really is. Part of this realism is the accurate description of the main character as an uncertain and anxious young man, overwhelmed by the circumstances in which he found himself. Everyone can identify with his thoughts and reactions.

Crane wrote several other books, but only *Red Badge* met with great success.

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# The Red Badge of Courage

*by Stephen Crane*

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# ***The Red Badge of Courage***

*by Stephen Crane*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Identity and Characterization**

1. What does the “noise of rumors” in paragraph one bring to mind?

Ans: This phrase suggests the impending force and violence that is to take place. Often conflicting “scuttlebutt” tends to magnify the fear that already is in the mind.

2. What are the two worlds in which the young private lives?

Ans: He lives in the world of fantasy and the real world.

3. What had happened to the “youthful private” who listened to the tall soldier and his predictions?

Ans: The young man had thought about battle only in vague, imaginary terms. When he realized that he might have to face the reality of violence and bloodshed, he was “astonished” and began to have “new thoughts” about the matter. (Shades of Walter Middy)

4. We all want to have approval. We need to be approved by ourselves and by others. How is this revealed in the lives of the men in the story?

Ans: They resort to fantasy as a substitute for daily reality. Their lives are drab. Life in the military camp is boring and discouraging.

5. Henry had prepared himself to announce his grown up intentions at home. He had envisioned a “beautiful scene,” but all he said was, “Ma, I’ve enlisted.” Why did this happen? What does it tell us?

Ans: His fantasy world called for fancy speeches and touching scenes. The reality at home had no place for this. There, to his mother, he was still just a child.

6. How does this situation point up the same dilemma in which most young people find themselves?

Ans: God created us with an imagination. We use this blessing properly when we attempt to conceive of what a new situation will

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be like. It is a good thing to think and plan ahead. Sometimes, our conjecturing and strategizing gets away from us. We allow ourselves to go scheming far beyond reality, and then find it hard to come back to earth. We must be careful to use our imagination carefully and not grow to be too dependent on our fantasies.

7. The boys talk a lot about what they would do if “things got hot.” They begin to admit that they would run if everyone else did. What would you do if you went to college and the professor spoke against Christ? What if the whole class agreed with him?

### **Images and Irony**

1. What did the author mean by the term, “Greeklike struggles?”

Ans. He is probably referring to battle in which men find fame and honor. Greek mythology and the Greek (pagan) mind glorifies war. The author says through Henry that he thought this mentality had ceased to exist, that education and the gospel had eradicated such thinking.

2. Should the church support a nation’s wars? Do you think the author suggests that it is the church’s role to give such support? As Henry lay in bed one night he had heard church bells that he thought were celebrating some victory. It seems to suggest that he was urged by this to enlist.

Ans. The Church should speak to all political matters faithfully in terms of God’s law. Political action may or may not be right and good. It seldom is clearly one or the other, but is mixed with both good and evil. The author here doesn’t seem to make a great deal about the war itself. This dramatic reference to the tolling of the bell creates an interesting image.

### **Vocabulary**

1. affront - something taken as an offensive word or act
  2. lucid - clear, distinct words or ideas
  3. intricate - complex, fine and complicated
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4. prowess - cleverness, ability
  5. secular - matters that are outside religion
  6. lurid - sensational, racy
  7. impregnable - secure, unbeatable
  8. ordeal - trying experience, test
  9. demure - serious, modest

## **Chapter 2**

### **Identity and Characterization**

1. How does Henry attempt to discover the hidden apprehension in the other men?

Ans. He speaks to them, trying to find if there was “another who suspected himself.” He especially watches Jim, a man who he thinks is like himself. Wilson, who earlier had admitted fear, later seemed to show no signs of it.

2. How is the tension in the soldiers shown?

Ans. Tension causes the sharp argument between the tall soldier and another man about the truth or falsehood of the rumor. Also, the men sometimes joke and laugh too much as they march. They over react to certain things, such as the horse-stealing incident.

3. How does the author characterize the officers, the enlisted men?

Ans. The colonel is aloof. He sits on his horse, towering over the men. He has too much concern for his cigars, while failing to notice the needs and fears of the men. This expresses a typical aversion to an authority. It brings to mind a sense that the authority is unfair and uncaring.

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