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Red Badge of Courage

The Red Badge of Courage, written by Stephen Crane, uses imagery and symbols of courage to demonstrate the battle against fear and how anyone can conquer fear. Henry, the main character, is faced with an inner dilemma: he doesn't know if his gut reaction will be to fight or to run away when he enters the battle. In the beginning, Henry stands firm with his brigade. However, when the enemy ambushes them, Henry is thrown into combat with the full force of the enemy and becomes terrified. Then he ran away, along with some other fellow soldiers. This act of desertion filled him with guilt. After meeting with some other wounded soldiers and trying to blend in, they started asking questions about how he was hurt. He ran away from them, too, because he was unscathed. Now in the middle of the woods, he was startled as a brigade of his allies was in total disarray and retreat. After Henry tried to ask a soldier what was going on, he was met with the butt end of a rifle, which smashed into his head, leaving a big bloody scar.

This scar is a great example of symbolism, but what it represents changes throughout the book. This was not some minor, playful wound; rather, it sent Henry staggering throughout the woods, dazed and confused. As he met up with other wounded soldiers in the woods, Henry lied about how he acquired his wound, saying he had been nicked in the head by a bullet. In this scenario, Henry uses his scar as a wall to hide behind so that others wouldn't know of his cowardice. While not described by the author, Henry's wound throbs throughout the rest of the story. Each throb being a constant reminder that he was a deserting soldier.

Later, Henry luckily is reunited with his brigade, who all thought he had died in their first skirmish. With his anguishing wound on his head as a constant reminder of his failure, Henry convinces himself that he will stay strong when faced with another battle. Until now, his wound has been an embarrassment for him. A perfect example is when he was first found after being smacked over the head; the soldier helping wrap him up said that the wound was very peculiar because it looked more like he had been struck over the head rather than having been nicked by a stray bullet. This was the actual truth of what had happened, but Henry just continued to lie about what happened to him. This encounter was a real reawakening for Henry, showing that he wouldn't be able to hide behind his wound and bring back glory and honor to his family unless he changed something.

Henry's brigade is called to launch an offensive against the enemy. While they are the most untrained and expendable out of the companies, they fought valiantly, but Henry especially stood out. When the flag bearer was shot, Henry bravely picked it up, even though it would paint him as a target, and continued courageously fighting the enemy. Eventually, when the enemy had been driven back from their cover, and the fighting had died out, Henry returned to camp and heard jabs and quips about how they barely made any progress. This discouraged Henry again, but it all changed when he heard one of the captains complimenting the soldier who picked up the flag and "fought like a hound." While Henry did not gain any more severe wounds from this encounter, but it changed what the scar on his forehead, which was already there, meant to him. It now shows that while he did run because of fear, in the beginning, he conquered fear and gave everything to the war.

The Red Badge of Courage has proven to be a fantastic example that even though in everyday life, fear is a constant battle and is not easy to overcome, anyone can

overcome their fears. Sometimes it will take falling first and being thoroughly discouraged, but the war isn't over until it is won.