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*The Red Badge of Courage*

In *The Red Badge of Courage* Stephen Crane symbolizes colors and names to reveal the harshness and reality of war. Crane uses color to paint physical pictures and mental ones, all the while using the colors as symbols that expose what the Civil war was truly like. By using names throughout *The Red Badge of Courage* he develops the characters and shows that what a person is called can oftentimes define them. From this book, we learn that war is as much a mental battle as a physical one. Soldiers had to decide if they would take what they saw and learned from war to become a hero or a coward. Stephen Crane enhances all of these mental and physical battle fields with colors and names, relating them to the reader with strong symbolism.

*The Red Badge of Courage* is a war book filled with colors. The use of colors describes not only scenery, but thoughts and mentality, often with symbolism. Many colors are dark and match the color of the cruelty of war. Red and black are used constantly throughout the book and leave a dark dismal feeling. A perfect example of this physical scenery can be seen immediately within the first chapter, "A river, amber-tinted in the shadows of its banks, purred at the army's feet; and at night, when the stream had become of a sorrowful blackness, one could see across it the red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp-fires set in the low brows of distant hills." (1) An example of colors being used mentally and symbolically is, "War, the red animal, war, the blood-swollen god, would have bloated fill." (52) War is symbolized as a "red animal." It is not literally a red animal, but by using the color red which implies bloodshed and the use of animal which implies

wild and untamed, Stephen Crane masterfully describes war. This shows how colors do not always have to describe a physical appearance, but the meaning behind the color can describe something easily with one word. This simple sentence shows the harshness and reality of war by its use of colors through symbolism.

Characterism is another element that shows the harshness and reality of war. Oftentimes, characters are named, but not with names, such as Henry. Even though he is the main character, his real name is not frequently used. Rather he is referred to as “the youth” or “the young soldier” constantly throughout the story. This symbolizes how young Henry was and reminds the reader of the reality of the Civil war. Even “youth”, such as Henry who would have been a teenager in the book, fought. “The youth” relates the reader to Henry, sympathizing with him. We become sorry for him who must struggle at a young age. It also symbolizes the innocence of Henry that is stripped and robbed from him. We see him graduate into manhood. “With this conviction came a store of assurance” “He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.” (99). This symbolizes that Henry’s growing throughout the story caused him to *grow up*. He is still by age and physically a teenager, but now a man with lifelong experience from the hardship of war. It furthers the idea that names, age, and size - all physical elements - do not define a person, rather their actions do. He is the same body, with some outside wounds and blemishes that might not heal, but with mental scars that did heal. If he had not asked himself “How am I going to let this impact the rest of my life?” and learn from his mistakes and terrifying experiences, his scars would never have healed. Now they were memories, not forgotten, but healed. His “scars faded as flowers” (99).

In addition, the lack of use of names also symbolizes that oftentimes during war, names are forgotten in the heat of having to define oneself by their actions and experience. Soldiers are

forced to face their greatest fears and have to make a choice of whether or not these fears will define them and become their new name, or would they learn and grow creating a new name of wisdom and maturity. An example of this is Henry's fear of death is when he runs into the dead man, "The dead and the living man exchanged a long look" (35). Henry is terrified. This soldier died and is nameless. This terrifies Henry until he faces his fears at the end of the book and fights and realizes he can overcome his mistake and change his "name" from a coward to a hero.

In conclusion, *The Red Badge of Courage*, explains how soldiers had to decide if they would let the war that physically ended live on in their minds forever. Their war given names also define their personalities, such as "The youth." Henry is portrayed as a youthful soldier, who is forced to grow up under the pressure of war. While soldiers like Henry were eager to join war, they were faced with the harsh reality of death. It is about how they would respond to fear and if they would let it re-identify themselves, or would they overcome it and let their courage be their new name. Henry realizes at the end of the book that even though he ran, he overcame his fear and no longer let it identify him. His character develops and we see him shine. Henry changes from "the youth" and becomes a man who has fought not only for his country, but for himself. He realizes war is not just about a physical win, but a mental victory. He can live with his mistake of running because he overcame it and changed it. He saw the cruelty of war and decided to learn from it and not let it ruin him.