

 Prestwick House

Instant Short Story Pack



Each pack contains:

- Objectives
- Full Text of Story
- Student Questions
- Activities and Graphic Organizers
- Teacher Answer Guide

The Open Boat

BY STEPHEN CRANE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 2, 5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 2, 5



Objectives:

After completing the activities in this packet, the student will be able to:

- cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text (RL.9-10.1; 11-12.1),
- determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text (RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2),
- analyze...[the]...development [of] a theme or central idea over the course of the text, including how it...is shaped and refined by specific details (RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2), and
- analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text...create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise (RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5).

Time:

3-5 class periods

Materials:

✓ 1 copy of each handout per student:

- **Handout #1** (4 pages) – Purpose-setting and Motivational Activities
- **Handout #2** (25 pages) – Text of Story
- **Handout #3** (2 pages) – Student Questions
- **Handout #4** (12 pages) – Activities and Graphic Organizers

✓ Teacher Answer Guide

Procedure:

1. Reproduce all handouts.
2. Distribute **Handouts #1** and **#2**.
 - Allow students to read the short biography of Crane (approximately 10 minutes).
 - Read and discuss the information about Crane's work and ideas (approximately 20 minutes).
 - Assign the story to be read for homework (might require 2 nights' reading) OR
 - Allow students to read the story in class and perform the two **As you read**...activities.
3. Distribute **Handout #3**.
4. Give students time to read the questions (approximately 5 minutes).
5. Review with students what each question is asking for and what type of information is required for a thorough answer (e.g., references to prior knowledge, quotations from the story, additional reading or research, etc.).
6. Distribute **Handout #4**.
7. Walk the class through Question 1, demonstrating that in order to address a complex issue, it is often helpful to divide it into smaller subtopics. Students can then use the ideas generated by each subtopic to build a complete and thoughtful answer to the full question.

Stephen Crane

The Open Boat

Along with *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*, and “The Blue Hotel,” “The Open Boat” is one of Stephen Crane’s most famous works. As is usually the case with Crane’s stories, the surface simplicity of the plot and characters entices many readers to oversimplify their reading of the story.

In 1896, the Bachelier Syndicate, a company that provided specialized articles to various newspapers for them to print, sent Crane to Cuba to cover the tensions surrounding what would eventually erupt into the Spanish-American War. He left Jacksonville, Florida, on the *SS Commodore* on December 31, 1896. The *Commodore* ran aground twice and developed several leaks. The lifeboats were lowered in the early morning of January 2, 1897, and the *Commodore* sank by 7:00 a.m. Crane survived a day and a half in one of the last lifeboats boarded. With him in the dinghy were three other men, one of whom was the ship’s captain. The ordeal is the basis of “The Open Boat,” which is almost a completely factual account of the incident.

Because the incident is based on autobiographical facts, many readers are lulled into missing the story’s narrative structure, character types, and themes. Crane wrote “The Open Boat” immediately upon returning to New York from the *Commodore* ordeal. He sold the story to Scribner’s for \$300. It is one of the most clearly Naturalist of Crane’s stories, illustrating that Nature is indifferent to an individual’s struggle: A person who “deserves” to survive is just as likely not to, and one who does not deserve to live can easily survive. The universe, as Crane sees it, views each one’s life as equally invalid. This story also explores the psychology of the innocent bystander. The people on the shore no longer seem foolish and cruel once the reader realizes they have no way of knowing the men in the boat are in trouble.

As you read “The Open Boat,” look at Crane’s characteristic use of color and other sensory details to create vivid images in the minds of his readers. Then, contrast the realism of his descriptions with his failure to identify his characters by any means beyond their most superficial labels, the Cook, the Oiler, the Captain, the Correspondent. Consider what effect Crane is trying to create—what ideas he might be exploring—by putting these Everymen into such a specific setting and situation.

Stephen Crane

The Open Boat

Lexile Measure: 960L

*A Tale Intended to be after the Fact:
Being the Experience of Four Men from the Sunk
Steamer Commodore.*

I

NONE OF THEM KNEW the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks.

Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: "Gawd! That was a narrow clip." As he remarked it, he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

Stephen Crane

The Open Boat

STUDENT QUESTIONS:

1. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2) As the correspondent contemplates the wind tower on the shore, the narrator says:

It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent.

What theme is Crane introducing in this passage? Trace the development of this theme through the course of the story. What seemingly ironic event drives home Crane's notion of an indifferent Nature?

2. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2) Consider the episode in which the men in the boat realize that the people on shore are not their rescuers. How does the following exchange further develop Crane's main idea for this story?

'Td like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck.'
'Why? What did he do?'
'Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful.'

3. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5) It is a common convention of the Naturalists to populate their stories more with character types than specific individuals. What effect does Stephen Crane achieve by identifying his characters simply as "the captain," "the cook," and "the correspondent"? How does Crane's choice to name one of the characters contribute to the story's overall impact?

Question 1 continued:

The Naturalists searched for meaning in the seemingly irrational and violent nature of humankind.

Naturalism was also concerned with nature’s relationship to humanity. The Naturalists did not believe in a personified “Mother Nature,” but in an indifferent universe.

The main characters of “The Open Boat” experience both the indifference of nature and the unknowing, uncaring nature of humanity.

Quotation 1:

It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of Nature amid the struggles of the individual— Nature in the wind, and Nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent.

Quotation 2:

‘I’d like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck.’

‘Why? What did he do?’

‘Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful.’

How do these illustrate Naturalism?



What specific aspects of Naturalism does each illustrate?

	←→	
	←→	
	←→	
	←→	
	←→	
	←→	