# *[An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/375/375-h/375-h.htm)*

Sample Text-dependent Questions

This Ambrose Bierce short story is available in the public domain at Project Gutenberg.

1. Vocabulary: acclivity, embrasure, dignitary, fixity, presaging, roseate, gyration, imperious, manifestations, undulations, ineffable, delirium. (Teachers may choose to use jigsawing or other cooperative activities in teaching the vocabulary prior to reading this short story.)
2. Identify the setting. How would the story change if the setting were different?
3. What does the reader learn about Peyton Farquhar? When? What is the effect of telling this story in sections rather than chronologically?
4. Reread the last paragraph of section II. What vital information does this provide to the reader?
5. Define psychological fiction. How does this short story fit into the definition of this genre?
6. From what point of view is each section told? How does point of view affect the outcome of this piece?
7. Reread the following section: Peyton Farquhar was a well to do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. *Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with that gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in the aid of the South, no adventure to perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.*

Explain the allusion. What do the underlined sections explain about Farquhar’s character? Why does he get involved?

1. Reread the following section: *Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them.* Nevertheless, this one had missed. How does this section provide vital information to the reader?
2. Reread the following section: *The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of AEolian harps. He had not wish to perfect his escape—he was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.* Explain the allusion of Aeolian.
3. Watch the Youtube short film [*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuP5kUQro40) *.* In writing*,* compare the author’s portrayal of Farquhar in the story and the film. Which one is more sympathetic to Farquhar? Compare and contrast the treatment of Farquhar in both the text and the film. Support your answer with details from both.
4. Is Ambrose Bierce sympathetic to the Union or the Confederacy? Cite specific phrases to support your response. Document these correctly.
5. Read the top 10 arguments on pro or con for the death penalty on [Death Penalty ProCon.org](http://deathpenalty.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=002000) Choose a position on the death penalty. Write a persuasive essay arguing your side. Support your opinion and provide counterarguments using facts and court cases from the information on this Web site.
6. Take on the role of Farquhar’s defense or prosecuting attorney. Research your case based on the text and facts listed on the death penalty pro/con Web site. Prepare your closing argument for the jury summarizing your case and arguing against your opponent. Remember Peyton Farquhar’s life is in your hands. Present your argument to a jury of your peers, the class, and allow them to vote afterward.