

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

Short Story by Ambrose Bierce

Can we escape the INEVITABLE?

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” opens with an execution about to take place. Standing on a heavily guarded bridge, with a noose around his neck, the main character is doomed. There is no escape. Or is there?

QUICKWRITE Think of a time when you have been in a difficult or even dangerous situation. What were your thoughts and feelings at the time? Jot down a few notes in the notebook at left.

My Situation: _____

My Thoughts & Feelings:

Text Analysis: Point of View

The narrator is the voice that tells a story. The narrator’s **point of view** greatly affects the events and the development of the characters in a story. The chart below shows three common points of view used in fiction stories.

first person	told by a character in the story; the reader knows only the narrator’s thoughts and feelings Example: <i>I stood upon a railroad bridge, looking down into the swift water below.</i>
third-person limited	told by a voice outside the story; the reader knows only one character’s thoughts and feelings Example: <i>He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children.</i>
third-person omniscient	told by a voice outside the story who describes all characters objectively, and may also reveal the thoughts and feelings of various characters Example: <i>The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. . . . Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect.</i>

As you read, look for clues that help identify the point of view.

Reading Skill: Analyze Structure

To analyze the **structure** of a literary work, you examine the relationship between its parts and its content. This story is divided into three numbered sections, each of which occurs at a different point in time. After you read each section, summarize the events that occur and note when they take place. Activities in the margin will prompt you to record notes such as those shown in the chart below.

	What Happens	When
Section I	<i>A man is standing on a bridge, about to be hanged.</i>	<i>the present time of the story (sometime during the Civil War)</i>

Vocabulary in Context

Note: Words are listed in the order in which they appear in the story.

summarily (sə-mĕr'ə-lē) *adv.* quickly and without ceremony
*The principal ended his speech and **summarily** dismissed us.*

poignant (poin'yənt) *adj.* physically or mentally painful
*The memory of her grandmother's death was a **poignant** one.*

oscillation (ös'ə-lā'shən) *n.* the action of swinging back and forth
*The **oscillation** of the pendulum was hypnotizing to watch.*

ludicrous (loo'dĭ-krəs) *adj.* laughably absurd; ridiculous
*"My dog ate my homework" is a **ludicrous** excuse.*

presaging (prĕs'ĭj-ĭng) *adj.* predicting
*The towering black clouds were **presaging** a bad storm.*

interminable (ĭn-tŭr'mə-nə-bəl) *adj.* endless
*They sat through the politician's **interminable** speech.*

ineffable (ĭn-ĕf'ə-bəl) *adj.* beyond description; inexpressible.
*He had a feeling of **ineffable** joy when he saw the new baby.*

Vocabulary Practice

Review the vocabulary words and think about their meanings. Use at least three of the words to write what a person about to be executed might be thinking.

**SET A PURPOSE
FOR READING**

Read this short story to find out how the author uses the story of one man, Peyton Farquhar, to make a general observation about war.

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AMBROSE BIERCE



BACKGROUND This story is set in the Deep South during the Civil War (1861–1865). Peyton Farquhar, a Southern gentleman, is being hanged by Union soldiers for plotting to damage the Owl Creek Bridge, a bridge in Union-held territory. As he awaits execution, he finds a way to escape. As you read, keep in mind that Southern (Confederate) soldiers wore gray uniforms, and Northern (Federal or Union) troops wore blue.

A POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 1–18. Think about whether the narrator is inside or outside the story. From what point of view is this story being told?

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers¹ supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon
10 the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as “support,” that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it. **A**

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad
20 ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving,

1. **sleepers:** railroad ties.



B POINT OF VIEW

In lines 29–51, underline the descriptions of the lieutenant, the captain, and the other soldiers. Also underline the description of the main character. What point of view are these descriptions told from? How do you know?

was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity² topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure³ through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at “parade rest,” the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock.⁴ A lieutenant stood at

30 the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

40 The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock-coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military

50 code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded. **B**

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved

2. **acclivity:** an upward slope.
 3. **embrasure:** a flared opening in a wall for a gun, with sides angled so that the inside opening is larger than that on the outside.
 4. **stock:** the wooden part of the rifle that serves as a handle.

C POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 52–69. Note that the third-person point of view narrows from omniscient to limited. Underline the details that alert you to this change in perspective.

apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This
60 plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his “unsteadfast footing,” then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream! **C**

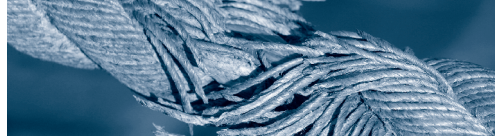
70 He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith’s hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but
80 as slow as the tolling of a death knell.⁵ He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch. **D**

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. “If I could free my hands,” he thought, “I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get
90 away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader’s farthest advance.”

5. **the tolling of a death knell:** the slow, steady ringing of a bell at a funeral or to indicate death.

D ANALYZE STRUCTURE

In lines 70–85, underline details that show how time slows for Peyton Farquhar as he stands on the bridge waiting to be hanged.



As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside. **E**

II

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 the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth,⁶ 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 war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too 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. **110**

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order." **F**

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

E ANALYZE STRUCTURE

Reread lines 86–94. If the story were told in chronological order, what would you expect to happen next?

F ANALYZE STRUCTURE

Reread lines 111–123. When do the events in Part II take place?

summarily (sə-mēr'ə-lē) *adv.*
quickly and without ceremony

6. **Corinth:** a town in Mississippi that was the site of a Civil War battle in 1862.

G POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 136–140. Underline an important detail that the reader knows, but Peyton Farquhar does not. Which type of third-person point of view allows the author to give the reader details that are hidden from the characters?

poignant (poin'yənt) *adj.*
physically or mentally painful

oscillation (ös'ə-lā'shən) *n.* the action of swinging back and forth

“Only a picket post⁷ half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge.”

130 “Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel,” said Farquhar, smiling, “what could he accomplish?”

The soldier reflected. “I was there a month ago,” he replied. “I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow.”⁸

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He
140 was a Federal scout. **G**

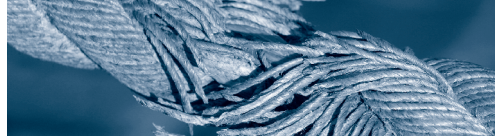
III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, **poignant** agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification⁹ and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his
150 head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of **oscillation**, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring

7. **picket post**: the camp of soldiers who are assigned to guard against a surprise attack.

8. **tow (tl)**: coarse, dry fiber.

9. **flash . . . ramification**: spread out rapidly along branches from a central point.



was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought
 160 was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen
 into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose
 about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water
 from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the
 idea seemed to him **ludicrous**. He opened his eyes in the darkness
 and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how
 inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and
 fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and
 brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—
 170 knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. “To be
 hanged and drowned,” he thought, “that is not so bad; but I do
 not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.”

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist
 apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the
 struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler,
 without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what
 magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine
 endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated
 upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light.
 He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other
 180 pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust
 it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water-snake.
 “Put it back, put it back!” He thought he shouted these words to
 his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the
 direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly;
 his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly,
 gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole
 body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish!¹⁰
 But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat
 the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to
 190 the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the
 sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and
 crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which
 instantly he expelled in a shriek! **PAUSE & REFLECT**

ludicrous (lōō’ dĭ-krēs) *adj.*
 laughably absurd; ridiculous

What makes the idea of hanging
 at the bottom of a river seem
ludicrous?

PAUSE & REFLECT

What has happened so far in
 Part III?

10. **racked . . . anguish:** stretched and twisted with unendurable physical pain.



Monitor Your Comprehension

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is unusual about Farquhar's senses in lines 194–208?

Horizontal lines for writing answers to the reflection question.

H POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 209–225. What point of view is this part of the story told from? Underline details that support your answer.

Horizontal lines for writing answers to the point of view question.

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon-flies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water. PAUSE & REFLECT

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, splattering 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. H

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier,



he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning’s work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, **presaging**, and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words:

“Attention, company! . . . Shoulder arms! . . . Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!”

240 Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished
250 reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

“The officer,” he reasoned, “will not make that martinet’s¹¹ error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God
260 help me, I cannot dodge them all!” **1**

An appalling plash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, *diminuendo*,¹² which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from

presaging (prĕs'ĭj-ĭng) *adj.*
predicting

1 POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 247–260. Underline Farquhar’s thoughts as the sentinels fire and miss. What point of view is used to narrate this passage? How do you know?

11. **martinet’s**: alluding to a strict disciplinarian or person who demands that regulations be followed exactly.

12. **diminuendo** (dĭ-mĭn'yōō-ĕn'dō) *Italian*: gradually decreasing in loudness.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread the description of how Farquhar feels once he reaches the shore in lines 274–293. What do these sensory details reveal about Farquhar?

interminable (ĭn-tŭr'mə-nə-bəl)
adj. endless

the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

270 “They will not do that again,” he thought; “the next time they will use a charge of grape.¹³ I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun.”

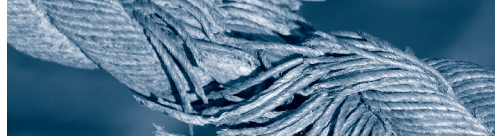
Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that
280 made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their
290 blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of æolian harps.¹⁴ He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

A whiz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoner had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed **interminable**; nowhere did he discover a break

13. **grape**: short for grapeshot, a cluster of several small iron balls fired in one shot from a cannon.

14. **music of æolian** (ē-ō'lē-ən) **harps**: heavenly, or unearthly, music.



300 in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By night fall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective.

310 Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again, he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue. **J**

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its

320 fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

J ANALYZE STRUCTURE

Reread lines 298–315. Underline details that show how much time seems to have passed since the moment Farquhar was standing on the bridge. What time of day is it now?





Monitor Your Comprehension

K ANALYZE STRUCTURE

Reread lines 323–336. Circle the present tense verbs in this paragraph. What effect does this have on the sense of story time?

ineffable (ĭn-ĕf'ə-bəl)
adj. beyond description;
inexpressible

PAUSE & REFLECT

What has happened? Explain the story's ending.

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, **330** steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of **ineffable** joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence! **K**

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

Text Analysis: Point of View

Read the two passages from “Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” shown in the chart below. Then complete the chart by listing which point of view each passage is told from and explaining how you know.

Text Passage	Which Point of View?
<p><i>One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands.</i> (lines 111–114)</p>	
<p><i>He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners.</i> (lines 209–213)</p>	

How do the shifts in point of view add to the **suspense**, or excitement of the story? How would the story be different if told entirely from the **third-person omniscient** point of view? Explain.

Reading Skill: Analyze Structure

Recall that to analyze a story's structure you look at the relationship between its parts and its content. Review the notes you made about the time period in which each part of the story occurs. Then answer the questions in each box below.

Part I	Part II	Part III
<p>Whose thoughts does the narrator relate?</p> <p>What does the captain's nod mean?</p>	<p>When do these events occur and what do they explain?</p>	<p>Would these be the thoughts of a man on the brink of death?</p> <p>What happens to Farquhar?</p>

Can we escape the INEVITABLE?

How did Farquhar attempt to escape his fate? In what ways was he successful? Was his response to his situation useful or destructive?

Vocabulary Practice

Decide whether these statements using the vocabulary words are true or false. Write *T* for True or *F* for False.

1. A **ludicrous** TV show episode would make you cry. _____
2. An action performed **summarily** takes a long time. _____
3. An **ineffable** pleasure is likely to leave you speechless with joy. _____
4. Climbing a very steep ladder is an example of **oscillation**. _____
5. You would typically describe a silly joke as **poignant**. _____
6. Messages **presaging** happiness might make you feel hopeful. _____
7. If a school day seems **interminable**, it feels like it will never be over. _____

Academic Vocabulary in Writing

conflict

create

element

emphasis

perspective

An easily overlooked **element** of this story is the fact that Farquhar was “set up” by a Federal scout posing as a Confederate soldier. Write a few sentences from the **perspective** of the scout, justifying the deceit that resulted in Farquhar’s death. Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response. Definitions for these terms are provided on page 193.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” to answer questions 1–5.

- The author tells this story out of sequence in order to —
 - create confusion
 - imitate Farquhar’s experience
 - create suspense
 - demonstrate his writing technique
- Lines 166–177 are written from which point of view?
 - third-person omniscient
 - third-person limited
 - second person
 - first person
- The description of the woods in lines 302–315 creates a mood of —
 - optimism
 - comfort
 - dread
 - injustice
- The author probably chose the third-person omniscient point of view for lines 337–339 in order to —
 - contrast what is happening in Farquhar’s mind with his physical reality
 - trick the reader into thinking that Farquhar really died
 - show what Farquhar is thinking and feeling in his final moments
 - keep the reader from sympathizing with Farquhar’s situation
- How does Part II clarify the events in the story?
 - It tells what happened after the hanging.
 - It explains Farquhar’s point of view.
 - It tells what happened to Owl Creek Bridge.
 - It explains why Farquhar is being hanged.