

Hoping to experience the excitement of war, 18-year-old Henry Fleming has decided to enlist in the Union army. Read the excerpt from Stephen Crane's famous Civil War novel, The Red Badge of Courage, and answer the questions that follow.

from **The Red Badge of Courage**
by Stephen Crane

- 1 The youth was in a little trance of astonishment. So they were at last going to fight. On the morrow, perhaps, there would be a battle, and he would be in it. For a time he was obliged to labor to make himself believe. He could not accept with assurance an omen that he was about to mingle in one of those great affairs of the earth.
- 2 He had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life—of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess. But awake he had regarded battles as crimson blotches on the pages of the past. He had put them as things of the bygone with his thought-images of heavy crowns and high castles. There was a portion of the world's history which he had regarded as the time of wars, but it, he thought, had been long gone over the horizon and had disappeared forever.
- 3 From his home his youthful eyes had looked upon the war in his own country with distrust. It must be some sort of a play affair. He had long despaired of witnessing a Greeklike struggle. Such would be no more, he had said. Men were better, or more timid. Secular¹ and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions.
- 4 He had burned several times to enlist. Tales of great movements shook the land. They might not be distinctly Homeric, but there seemed to be much glory in them. He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds.
- 5 But his mother had discouraged him. She had affected to look with some contempt upon the quality of his war ardor and patriotism. She could calmly seat herself and with no apparent difficulty give him many hundreds of reasons why he was of vastly more importance on the farm than on the field of battle. She had had certain ways of expression that told him that her statements on the subject came from a deep conviction. Moreover, on her side, was his belief that her ethical motive in the argument was impregnable.²

¹ *secular* — not religious; worldly

² *impregnable* — impossible to overcome

6 At last, however, he had made firm rebellion against this yellow light thrown upon
the color of his ambitions. The newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturings,
had aroused him to an uncheckable degree. They were in truth fighting finely down
there. Almost every day the newspapers printed accounts of a decisive victory.

7 One night, as he lay in bed, the winds had carried to him the clanging of the
church bell as some enthusiast jerked the rope frantically to tell the twisted news of a
great battle. This voice of the people rejoicing in the night had made him shiver in a
prolonged ecstasy of excitement. Later, he had gone down to his mother's room and
had spoken thus: "Ma, I'm going to enlist."

8 "Henry, don't you be a fool," his mother had replied. She had then covered her face
with the quilt. There was an end to the matter for that night.

9 Nevertheless, the next morning he had gone to a town that was near his mother's
farm and had enlisted in a company that was forming there. When he had returned
home his mother was milking the brindle cow. Four others stood waiting. "Ma, I've
enlisted," he had said to her diffidently. There was a short silence. "The Lord's will be
done, Henry," she had finally replied, and had then continued to milk the brindle cow.

10 When he had stood in the doorway with his soldier's clothes on his back, and with the
light of excitement and expectancy in his eyes almost defeating the glow of regret for the
home bonds, he had seen two tears leaving their trails on his mother's scarred cheeks.

11 Still, she had disappointed him by saying nothing whatever about returning with his
shield or on it.³ He had privately primed himself for a beautiful scene. He had prepared
certain sentences which he thought could be used with touching effect. But her words
destroyed his plans. She had doggedly peeled potatoes and addressed him as follows:
"You watch out, Henry, an' take good care of yerself in this here fighting business—you
watch out, an' take good care of yerself. Don't go a-thinkin' you can lick the hull rebel
army at the start, because yeh can't. Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others,
and yeh've got to keep quiet an' do what they tell yeh. I know how you are, Henry.

12 "I've knet yeh eight pair of socks, Henry, and I've put in all yer best shirts, because I
want my boy to be jest as warm and comf'able as anybody in the army. Whenever they
get holes in 'em, I want yeh to send 'em right-away back to me, so's I kin dern 'em.

13 "An' allus be careful an' choose yer comp'ny. There's lots of bad men in the army,
Henry. The army makes 'em wild, and they like nothing better than the job of leading
off a young feller like you, as ain't never been away from home much and has allus
had a mother, an' a-learning 'em to drink and swear. Keep clear of them folks, Henry.
I don't want yeh to ever do anything, Henry, that yeh would be 'shamed to let me know
about. Jest think as if I was a-watchin' yeh. If yeh keep that in yer mind allus, I guess
yeh'll come out about right.

14 "Yeh must allus remember yer father, too, child, an' remember he never drunk a
drop of licker in his life, and seldom swore a cross oath.

15 "I don't know what else to tell yeh, Henry, excepting that yeh must never do no
shirking, child, on my account. If so be a time comes when yeh have to be kilt or do

³ *returning with his shield or on it* — returning as a hero or as someone who died honorably

a mean thing, why, Henry, don't think of anything 'cept what's right, because there's many a woman has to bear up 'ginst sech things these times, and the Lord 'll take keer of us all.

16 “Don't forgit about the socks and the shirts, child; and I've put a cup of blackberry jam with yer bundle, because I know yeh like it above all things. Good-by, Henry. Watch out, and be a good boy.”

17 He had, of course, been impatient under the ordeal of this speech. It had not been quite what he expected, and he had borne it with an air of irritation. He departed feeling vague relief.

18 Still, when he had looked back from the gate, he had seen his mother kneeling among the potato parings. Her brown face, upraised, was stained with tears, and her spare form was quivering. He bowed his head and went on, feeling suddenly ashamed of his purposes.

19 From his home he had gone to the seminary to bid adieu to many schoolmates. They had thronged about him with wonder and admiration. He had felt the gulf now between them and had swelled with calm pride. He and some of his fellows who had donned blue were quite overwhelmed with privileges for all of one afternoon, and it had been a very delicious thing. They had strutted.

20 A certain light-haired girl had made vivacious⁴ fun at his martial spirit, but there was another and darker girl whom he had gazed at steadfastly, and he thought she grew demure and sad at sight of his blue and brass. As he had walked down the path between the rows of oaks, he had turned his head and detected her at a window watching his departure. As he perceived her, she had immediately begun to stare up through the high tree branches at the sky. He had seen a good deal of flurry and haste in her movement as she changed her attitude. He often thought of it.

21 On the way to Washington his spirit had soared. The regiment was fed and caressed at station after station until the youth had believed that he must be a hero. There was a lavish expenditure of bread and cold meats, coffee, and pickles and cheese. As he basked in the smiles of the girls and was patted and complimented by the old men, he had felt growing within him the strength to do mighty deeds of arms.

22 After complicated journeyings with many pauses, there had come months of monotonous life in a camp. He had had the belief that real war was a series of death struggles with small time in between for sleep and meals; but since his regiment had come to the field the army had done little but sit still and try to keep warm.

23 He was brought then gradually back to his old ideas. Greeklike struggles would be no more. Men were better, or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions.

⁴ *vivacious* — lively