

An Episode of War & Thank You for Your Service

Get students reading, thinking, and writing and grading each other's work! Reinforce the concepts of Realism and Naturalism and the idea of recurring themes throughout American Literature. Meet and extend the Common Core Standards with paired texts.

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

This lesson is used in conjunction with the text "An Episode of War" in the Prentice Hall "An American Experience" 11th Grade Literature Book. This Stephen Crane story is available on the internet at:

<http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/1510/>

1. Students should be familiar with the concepts of realism and naturalism.
2. Begin with PPT and the idea that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Photography brought the reality of the battlefield into quiet homes far removed from war. (Contrast with Fireside Poets). Review the terms Realism and Naturalism and remind students that they will be looking for these elements in two texts written 150 years apart.
3. Preview the text "An Episode of War" with your students. Pass out the Graphic Organizer and direct them to consider these questions as they are reading, to discuss them with partners, and answer them on the organizer. Have students read the passage (individually, in teams, round robin).
4. Allow students time to discuss and answer GO questions. Come together and discuss answers.
5. Pass out copies of "Thank You for Your Service." Use the board to list things that the students know about the Iraq War, the politics, the soldiers, the after effects, etc. Explain that Adam served in the war and, like the Lieutenant, was injured; however, Adam's injuries were not visible.
6. Students should read this text and respond to the questions on the GO. Bring the class back together and discuss answers.
7. Pass out copies of the Synthesis questions and direct students to respond. Tell them other students will be reading their work. This can be done for homework. I collected these papers and redistributed them in the classroom and asked students to and "comment" on one another's work in a different ink. Papers were then passed back to the owners for review and class share.

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Please drop me a line and let me know how this worked for you!

Excerpt from *Thank You for Your Service* by David Finkel

Adapted from MSNBC.com

His first entry, on February 22:

Not much going on today. I turned my laundry in, and we're getting our TAT boxes. We got mortared last night at 2:30 a.m., none close. We're at FOB Rustamiyah, Iraq. It's pretty nice, got a good chow hall and facilities. Still got a bunch of dumb s---t to do though. Well, that's about it for today.

His last entry, on October 18:

I've lost all hope. I feel the end is near for me, very, very near. Darkness is all I see anymore.

So he was finished. Down to his final hours, he was packed, weaponless, under escort, and waiting for the helicopter that would take him away to a wife who had just told him on the phone: "I'm scared of what you might do."

"You know I'd never hurt you," he'd said, and he'd hung up, wandered around the FOB, gotten a haircut, and come back to his room, where he now said, "But what if she's right? What if I snap someday?"

It was a thought that made him feel sick. Just as every thought now made him feel sick. "You spend a thousand days, it gets to the point where it's Groundhog Day. Every day is over and over. The heat. The smell. The language. There's nothing sweet about it. It's all sour," he said. He remembered the initial invasion, when it wasn't that way. "I mean it was a front seat to the greatest movie I've ever seen in my life." He remembered the firefights of his second deployment. "I loved it. Anytime I get shot at in a firefight, it's the sexiest feeling there is." He remembered how this deployment began to feel bad early on. "I'd get in the Humvee and be driving down the road and I would feel my heart pulsing up in my throat." That was the start of it, he said, and then Emory happened, and then Crow happened, and then he was in a succession of explosions, and then a bullet was skimming across his thighs, and then Doster happened, and then he was waking up thinking, "Holy s---t, I'm still here, it's misery, it's hell," which became, "Are they going to kill me today?" which became, "I'll take care of it myself," which became, "Why do that? I'll go out killing as many of them as I can, until they kill me."

"I didn't give a s---k," he said. "I wanted it to happen. Bottom line—I wanted it over as soon as possible, whether they did it or I did it."

The amazing thing was that no one knew. Here was all this stuff going on, pounding heart, panicked breathing, sweating palms, electric eyes, and no one regarded him as anything but the great soldier he'd always been, the one who never complained, who hoisted bleeding soldiers onto his back, who'd suddenly begun insisting on being in

the right front seat of the lead Humvee on every mission, not because he wanted to be dead but because that's what selfless leaders would do.

He was the great soldier who one day walked to the aid station and went through the door marked combat stress and asked for help and now was on his way home.

Now he was remembering what the psychologist had told him: "With your stature, maybe you've opened the door for a lot of guys to come in."

"That made me feel really good," he said. And yet he had felt so awful the previous day when he told one of his team leaders to round up everyone in his squad.



"What'd we do now?"

"You didn't do anything," he said. "Just get them together."

They came into his room, and he shut the door and told them he was leaving the following day. He said the hard part: that it was a mental health evacuation. He said to them, "I don't even know what I'm going through. I know that I don't feel right."

He had never felt so guilt-ridden in his life.

Early this morning, they had driven away on a mission, leaving him behind, and after they'd disappeared, he had no idea what to do. He stood there for a while alone. Eventually he walked back to his room. He turned up his air conditioner to high. When he got cold enough to shiver, he put on warmer clothes and stayed under the vents. He packed his medication. He stacked some packages of beef jerky and mac 'n' cheese and smoked oysters, which he wouldn't be able to take with him, for the soldiers he was leaving behind and wrote a note that said "Enjoy."

His stomach hurt as he made his way across the FOB. He felt himself becoming nauseated. At the landing area, other soldiers from other battalions were lined up, and when the helicopter landed, everyone was allowed to board except him. He didn't understand.

"Next one's yours," he was told, and when it came in a few minutes later, he realized why he'd had to wait. It had a big red cross on the side. It was the helicopter for the injured and the dead.

That was him, Adam Schumann. He was injured. He was dead. He was done.

Two years later: Adam drops the baby.

The baby, who is four days old, is his son, and there is a moment as he is falling that this house he has come home to seems like the most peaceful place in the world. Outside is the cold dead of 3:00 a.m. on a late-November night in Kansas, but inside is lamplight, the warm smell of a newborn, and Adam's wife, Saskia, beautiful Saskia, who a few minutes before had asked her husband if he could watch the baby so she could get a little sleep. "I got it," he had said. "I got it. Get some rest." She curled up in the middle of their bed, and the last thing she glimpsed was Adam reclined along the edge, his back against the headboard and the baby in his arms. He was smiling, as if contentment for this wounded man were possible at last, and she believed it enough to shut her eyes, just before he shut his. His arms soon relaxed. His grip loosened. The baby rolled off of his chest and over the edge of the bed, and here came that peaceful moment, the baby in the air, Adam and Saskia asleep, everyone oblivious, the floor still a few inches away, and now, with a crack followed by a thud, the moment is over and everything that will happen is under way.

Saskia is the one who hears it. It is not loud, but it is loud enough. Her eyes fly open. She sees Adam closed-eyed and empty-armed, and only when he hears screaming and feels the sharp elbows and knees of someone scrambling across him does he wake up from the sleep he had promised he didn't need. It takes him a second or two. Then he knows what he has done.

He says nothing. There is nothing he can say. He is sorry. He is always sorry now. He has been sorry for two years, ever since he slunk home from the war. He watches his wife scoop up the baby. He keeps watching, wishing she would look at him, willing her to, always so in need of forgiveness, but she won't. She clutches the crying baby as he dresses and leaves the room. He sits for a while in the dark, listening to her soothe the baby, and then he goes outside, gets into his pickup truck, and positions a shotgun so that it is propped up and pointed at his face. In that way, he starts driving, while back in the house, Saskia is trying to understand what happened. A crack. A thud. The thud was the floor, and thank God for the ugly carpet. But what was the crack? The bed frame? The nightstand?

This baby. So resilient. Breathing evenly. Not even a mark. Somehow fine. How can that be? But he is. Maybe he is one of the lucky ones, born to be okay. Saskia lies with him, then gets up and comes back with a plastic bottle of water. She drops it from the side of the bed and listens to the sound it makes as it hits the floor.

She drops a pair of heavy shoes and watches them bounce. She finds a basketball and rolls it off the edge.

She fills a drink container with enough water to weigh about as much as the baby, and as Adam continues driving and considering the gun, not yet, not yet, not yet, not yet, she rolls that off the edge, too.

Two years. He is twenty-eight now, is out of the army, and has gained back some weight. When he left the war as the great Sergeant Schumann, he was verging on gaunt. Twenty-five pounds later, he is once again solid, at least physically. Mentally, though, it is still the day he headed home. Emory, shot in the head, is still draped across his back, and the blood flowing out of Emory's head is still rivering into his mouth. Doster, whom he might have loved the most, is being shredded again and again by a roadside bomb on a mission Adam was supposed to have been on, too, and after Doster is declared dead another soldier is saying to him, "None of this would have happened if you were there." It was said as a soldier's compliment—Adam had the sharpest eyes, Adam always found the hidden bombs, everyone relied on Adam—but that wasn't how he heard it then or hears it now. It might as well have been shrapnel, the way those words cut him apart. It was his fault. It is his fault. The guilt runs so deep it defines him now. He's always been such a good guy, people say of Adam. He's the one people are drawn to, who they root for, smart, decent, honorable, good instincts, that one. And now? "I feel completely broken," Adam says.

"He's still a good guy" is what Saskia says. "He's just a broken good guy."

She says it as an explanation of why on some days she has hope that he will once again be the man he was before he went to war. It's not as if he caused this. He didn't. It's not as if he doesn't want to get better. He does. On other days, though, it seems more like an epitaph, and not only for Adam. All the soldiers he went to war with—the 30 in his platoon, the 120 in his company, the 800 in his battalion—came home broken in various degrees, even the ones who are fine. "I don't think anyone came back from that deployment without some kind of demons they needed to work out," one of those soldiers who was with Adam says.

"I'm sure I need help," another says, after two years of night sweats and panic attacks.

"Constant nightmares, anger issues, and anytime I go into a public place I have to know what everyone is doing all the time," another of them says.

"Depression. Nightmares of my teeth falling out," another says.

"I get attacked at home," another says. "Like I'm sitting in my house and I get attacked by Iraqis. That's how it works. Weird --s dreams."

"Other than that, though," the one who might be in the best shape of all says with an embarrassed laugh, after mentioning that his wife tells him he screams every night as he falls asleep. He sounds bewildered by this, as do they all.

"I have to admit a day doesn't go by that I don't think about those days, the boys we lost, and what we did," another says. "But life goes on."

An Episode of War

Battles – locate passages where battles are described. How are they described?	
Medical Practices – what do you know about medical practices of the era? How does it affect the character (mentally and physically)?	
Social Situation and Attitude – what is the social situation/attitude of the character in relation to the other characters or the setting?	
Trace the groups the soldier meets as he walks towards the hospital tent. Who are they, how does he react to them? How do you think he feels? Locate quotes to support your thinking.	

Thank You for Your Service

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Trace the events on page 2. How does Adam feel? Locate quotes to support your thinking.	

An Episode of War- Answer Key

<p>Battles – locate passages where battles are described. How are they described?</p>	<p>The Lieutenant is using his sword to divide up coffee rations. He is not involved in a battle. In fact, he has to have assistance in putting his weapon away after he is shot. When he is shot, he stares off in the distance at a raging battle. Ask students: How might the circumstances of his injury affect his attitude?</p>
<p>Medical Practices – what do you know about medical practices of the era? How does it affect the character (mentally and physically)?</p>	<p>Answers vary. Surgery was primitive, no sanitation, anesthesia, or pain killers. Amputation often ended in death. The Lieutenant would be aware of these facts.</p>
<p>Social Situation and Attitude – what is the social situation/attitude of the character in relation to the other characters or the setting?</p>	<p>The Lieutenant is an officer of higher rank than the troops. However, he seems to be in charge of supplies, which may keep him away from the front lines. This is safe, yet not as noble. He may have guilt about not being a “real” soldier. Troops must respect his rank, but may think less of him because of his job.</p>
<p>Trace the groups the soldier meets as he walks towards the hospital tent. Who are they, how does he react to them? How do you think he feels? Locate quotes to support your thinking.</p>	<p>1. Stragglers, probably regular troops, who show great knowledge of battle; “The lieutenant, carrying his wounded arm rearward, looked upon them with wonder.” He feels lost and that everyone knows more than himself.</p> <p>2. A group of officers who offer help and advice; “The lieutenant hung his head, feeling, in this presence, that he did not know how to be correctly wounded.” He feels as though he cannot even react properly.</p> <p>3. The very busy and battle-hardened surgeon; “This wound evidently placed the latter on a very low social plane.” He feels as though he even botched up getting wounded.</p>

Thank You for Your Service – Answer Key

<p>Battles – locate passages where battles are described. How are they described?</p>	<p>There are no battle scenes. He describes how he saved his comrades when they were shot. He describes events as from distance.</p>
<p>Medical Practices – what do you know about medical practices of the era? How does it affect the character (mentally and physically)?</p>	<p>Answers vary. Adam is not physically wounded but is extremely guilt ridden and unable to cope mentally. He is seeing a psychologist. Students may know about PTSD. Ask students to locate all the references to guilt.</p>
<p>Social Situation and Attitude – what is the social situation/attitude of the character in relation to the other characters or the setting?</p>	<p>Adam is looked up to by his comrades because he has the qualities of a good soldier; he is sharp-eyed and always finds the bombs. This makes him feel responsible for the other guys, but he feels as though he is fooling them because he is really very frightened. The psychologist tells him that when he admitted his issues, he may have made others more comfortable to come forward.</p>
<p>Trace the events on page 2. How does Adam feel? Locate quotes to support your thinking.</p>	<p>1. He drops the baby; he wanted to help out and allow Saskia to sleep, but he drifts off. He feels as if he can't do anything right. “He is sorry. He is always sorry now. He has been sorry for two years, ever since he slunk home from the war.”</p> <p>2. He sits in his truck and thinks about suicide because he feels lost and ineffective. “It was his fault. It is his fault. The guilt runs so deep it defines him now.”</p>

An Episode of War & Thank You for Your Service

Synthesis: Consider both texts as you answer these questions. Use complete sentences in paragraph form. DO NOT USE BULLET POINTS. Leave several lines between your responses for reader commentary. Other students will be reading your paper.

1. Who do you think was more deeply wounded the Lieutenant or Adam? Explain.
2. The Lieutenant's story unfolds as he describes his encounters between the shooting and his arrival at the hospital tent. Adam's story is told partially through a description of events that happened two years after he leaves the war. How do these anecdotes help develop the character and the story? How do they make you feel about the characters?
3. Use evidence from both texts to show elements of realism and naturalism.
4. Read these final lines from both texts.

"I have to admit a day doesn't go by that I don't think about those days, the boys we lost, and what we did," another says. "But life goes on."

"Oh, well," he said, standing shamefaced amid these tears, "I don't suppose it matters so much as all that."

Explain why these men both feel guilt and/or shame and how they are coping with it.

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