Study Questions
“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”
Ambrose Bierce

1. In Section I, Bierce includes few details about the condemned man and does not reveal the reason why he is being hanged. How does this help create suspense?
2. In what ways are the condemned man’s perceptions of time and motion distorted as he is waiting to be hanged? What might be an explanation for his distorted perceptions?
3. Consider Bierce’s descriptions of the sentinels on the bridge. How does their indifference / inaction toward the events taking place present Bierce’s views on the military?
4. What is the significance of the man’s perception of his ticking watch?
5. Why was Farquhar captured? Why did the Federal scout lie?
6. As the reader, at what point did you begin to sympathize with Farquhar? Why?
7. What details in Part III suggest that Farquhar’s journey occurs in his mind? How is the journey connected with the plan of escape that occurs to him moments before he is hanged?
8. How does Bierce’s use of flashback contribute to the effectiveness of the story?
9. Considering the outcome of the story, what is ironic or surprising about Farquhar’s longing for the “larger life of a soldier?” What is ironic about the fact that Farquhar agrees with the saying that, “all is fair in love and war?”
10. What is Bierce’s commentary about the effects of war on the individual? How do you know? Provide examples to support your answer.
11. Bierce’s works often attacked the Romantic sentimentality of the writers before him—how does this work reflect that this is true? What sentimental notions does this work attack?
12. How does this work function as a Realist work? Apply at least three characteristics from the notes and offer support for each.
13. Write a theme statement for this story.