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## Historical Novel: The Red Badge Of Courage

The main character in the book "The Red Badge of Courage" was a boy named Henry Fleming. Henry was very young and naive. He decided to leave home and join the American Civil War. He joined the Union. When he joined, he met someone named Jim. Jim was very dedicated to the war, and he didn't rely on others. Jim didn't end up surviving through the war, unfortunately he was shot. There is one more main character, his name was Wilson. Wilson was very loud. He got nicknamed as "the loud one", but he was always very generous towards Henry. The book doesn't give a ton of information about any of the characters, which makes it hard to decide if they could've existed in a real life situation. The book is a realistic fiction, so it isn't based off of a real story, but it could be. So I think that these characters would have existed in a real situation. I noticed that this book was related a lot towards the emotional side of the war rather than the actual war. It showed that the men all had their own distinct personalities, as well as their own situations. When Jim passed away, that could easily happen in a real war. They didn't sugar coat the story, but they didn't explain it very well either. The book didn't even say the name of the battle, all they said was "Civil War". That makes it really hard to relate to real history when it doesn't even give a battle that it was based off of. Although it is a realistic fiction book, it still could've had real people from history taking place in it. I didn't recognize any of the names. The characters in this book were completely made up by Stephen Crane, the author. Even though they weren't real, they still had a huge impact on the book. With their differing personalities and places in the book, it help made it more personable. It made it feel real, even though it was not. In the writing, they used such strange speech. You could tell that the author was trying to make it sound like a real person speaking. For example, "It ain't right. I tell you if anybody with any sense was a-runnin' this army it-"(29). That is Wilson speaking, and you can tell that the speech that was used sounded so real. You can picture a voice in your head, which helps show how this could really be a true event, and how the characters could've existed at this time. There were also several war scenes. One of the battle scenes talked about the Union defeating the Confederates. This could've taken place in real life because it did! Even though this book wasn't non-fiction, the events and characters probably could've been

I already mentioned how this book didn't specify very much information. It never mentioned exact settings in the book, but I did research to find out where this could've taken place. I started by researching where the Civil War took place, and there are so many places. The civil war took place from Virginia to Texas, and so forth. I tried to use the information from the book to discover which of the battles it was being written off, doing this was extremely difficult. I was going off of such small details and such little information. I ended up finding that this book was most likely based off of the Battle of Chancellorsville. The American Civil War took place from 1861-1865. The Battle of Chancellorsville took place in 1863, and went through the end of April to the beginning of May. It took place in a county called Spotsylvania. Spotsylvania is a small county, and Chancellorsville is near it. The book mentions that they used a forest as a blockade, this wilderness was located in Chancellorsville. It also mentions Rappahannock River. This is the river that is separating the Confederates and the Union. As I continued to research, I discovered that some critics think this was all in Henry's head. They claim that the characters and situations were all made up, and that Henry wasn't even in this situation. That's why this book is so complex. Stephen Crane was so vague, he made it so hard to distinguish between real life and imagination. Does the information match a historical time period? Yes, it does; but

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this is all made out of educated guesses and explanations for something that is actually unknown. We can try to add up the facts to discover if it's related to a real historical scene, but in reality, only the author knows.

I really loved the plot of this book. It was super interesting, and although there isn't much detail, it was entertaining. If the theories are right, and this is about the Battle of Chancellorsville, then it was historically accurate. The Battle of Chancellorsville, a real event, took place near a large amount of trees. Henry also finds himself in the trees as he fled from the battle scene. In history, the Union used the forest as a strategy for them to win. This also took place in the book. So historically and in *The Red Badge of Courage*, they used the same strategies to help them become more successful. A huge part of this book was the psychological aspect. Tony Horwitz states, "The Civil War killed and injured over a million Americans, roughly a third of all those who served. This grim tally, however, doesn't include the conflict's psychic wounds. Military and medical officials in the 1860s had little grasp of how war can scar minds as well as bodies". Historically, the Civil War took a huge drag on the soldiers' mental health. In the book, you can easily see how the war was influencing Henry's mental health. He never felt as if he were good enough, and he was so tough on himself. The author talked a lot about this throughout the book, which is super relatable for many soldiers that went through the situations that Henry went through in the war. By the end of the book, you saw a change in the way that Henry felt. The details that the author gave were all accurate, he didn't give enough details to know if there were any that he distorted or changed for the sake of the entertainment on his book.

The theme of this book was very relatable. Throughout the book, Henry struggled with finding out why he became a soldier. Henry started off as a young man who joined the war for a reputation. He wanted to have a big name and a big ego. He didn't want to join the war to help fight and win, he didn't want to be a hero for others. Henry wanted to be well known. As I was reading, it stated, "As he was basked in the smiles of the girls and was patented and complimented by the old men, he had felt growing within him the strength to do mighty deeds of arms"(7). After reading that, it shows how Henry starts off by thriving from attention. By the end of the book, you see that Henry changed. He took his mothers advice from the beginning and did what he was meant to do. He became this man who fought for the war, not for other people to watch him. He helped the Union defeat a huge battle. From that example, you can see that one of the themes is working for yourself. It does no good to work for pride or ego. You can become a better person with better outcomes as you continue to thrive off of your own successes without people watching. Another theme that was displayed was to not be envious of others. When Henry saw someone get injured, he felt jealousy. In his mind, injury showed courage. Hence, "*The Red Badge of Courage*". In the book it states, "At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He concieved persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage"(65). Henry felt as if an injury showed success. Throughout the book, he was hard on himself for this reason. It is an important theme to take into account. Work with what you have. You don't need to gain something that someone else has in order to be considered an achievement. Henry had to end up accepting himself and what he had done, and he had to realize that it was still a success. The last theme that I noticed was that hardships happen. Henry was fighting in a tough war where hundreds of lives were lost. There were many scenes of war in the book, "His body lay stretched out in the position of a tired man resting but upon his face there was an astonished and sorrowful look, as if he thought some friend had done him an ill turn"(41). This was a hard thing for Henry to witness, he had made strong relationships with some of the men that he fought with. Yet, he got through the passings of these men, which teaches a lesson of getting

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through times of hardships in our own lives.

Overall, this book was historically accurate. The events that Stephen Crane decided to incorporate into the book were true, but he didn't have very many. Considering his historical accuracy, I still think this book lies more on the fiction side. My reasoning for saying that is because he doesn't provide enough detail to prove that he is writing off of real things that have occurred in history. People have made guesses and theories, but nothing has been proven completely. For a book to be more on the fictional side, it wasn't as entertaining as other fictional books that I have read. I found some parts better than others, but some parts were extremely boring and hard to read. Although this novel wasn't the best example of historical events, it did show a great example of how the war impacted the soldiers psychological health. Henry's mental well being was a very big part of this story, which can make it a really neat story. For being written at the time period that it was (1894), it showed such a different side than most historical novels did at that same time period. This book made a super interesting point of view for people that read it. It shows not only some history, but the way that the people felt in these times of tragedy and warfare. It shows the mental side of a situation that lots of people today cannot relate to. Overall, I don't recommend this book if you are trying to do a historical analysis off of it. Stephen Crane is too complex and imprecise in his writing, and it makes it difficult to find the ways that this book relates to history. If you are looking for a good book to read, with an interesting perspective, I would recommend this. The Red Badge of Courage is a book that people should read in sake for understanding some important aspects of our history that is hard to find elsewhere, but it does not give complete data.

## References

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