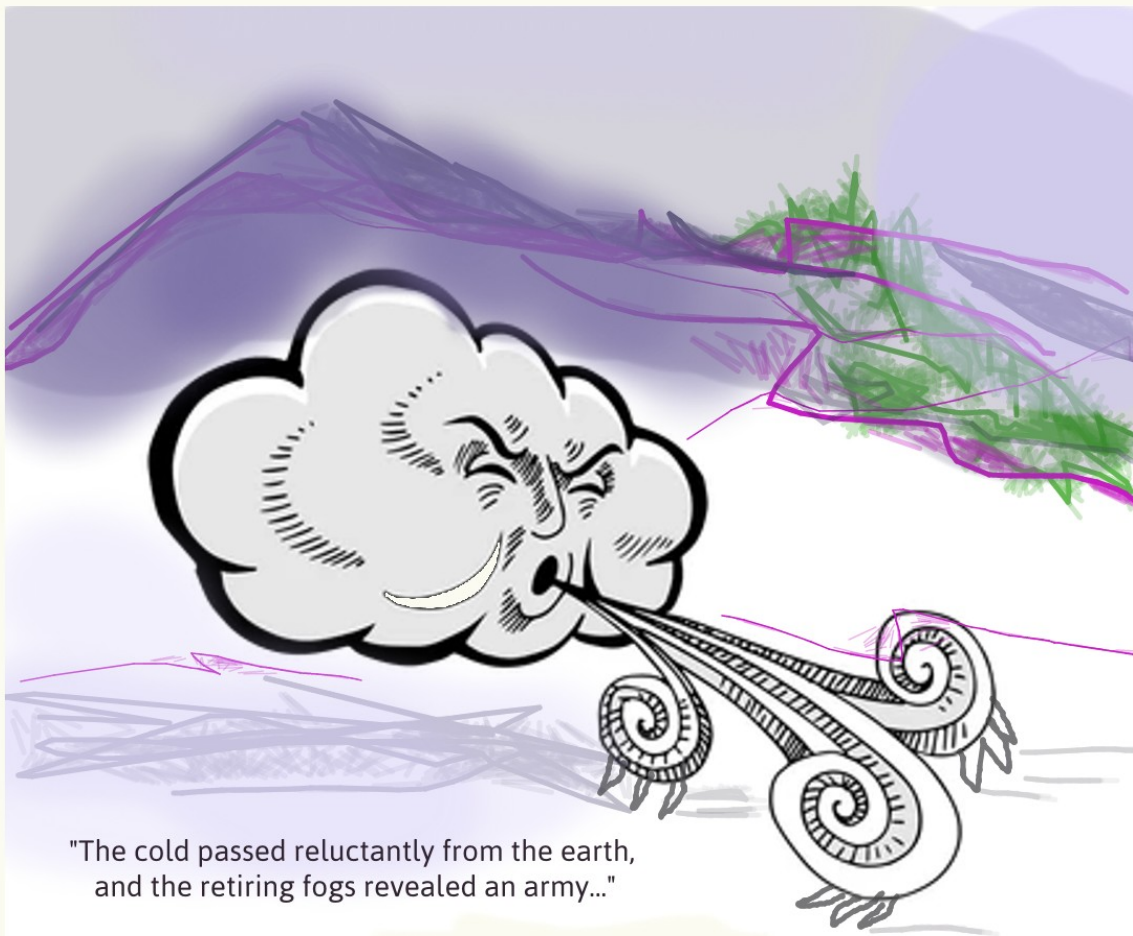


Novel Project #1: Comic Strip Scene

Memorable Metaphors of *The Red Badge of Courage*

A reviewer called *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane "one of the clearest cases of genius in American fiction" (Van Doren). I agree! I found that the pages of his Civil War novel were jam-packed with similes, metaphors, witty observations, and vivid language.



"The cold passed reluctantly from the earth,
and the retiring fogs revealed an army..."

The book begins with a personification of the weather: “the cold passed reluctantly from the earth” (Crane, 11). This gives human emotions to winter clouds that are stubbornly hanging on, digging in their heels, dragging their claws, and scratching the ground in a struggle to keep their icy grip on the land!

The beginning of the novel shocks you by abruptly shifting emotional gears – twice in a single sentence! Scenic small talk about the weather relaxes the reader, but then, “the retiring fogs” unexpectedly punch you with an alarming sight. The parting clouds reveal an army! Oh, no! What are those fighting men and weapons doing there? The tension evaporates almost immediately, however. The author reports that the army was not fiercely fighting, but merely resting. The mood flips from peace to momentary alarm, before settling back into an ironic and anti-climactic description of bored troops just sitting around in a monotonous routine of doing nothing.

Crane uses figurative language to create humor. Normally, a shouting military officer would be intimidating. But Crane compares the colonel to a puffed-up, screeching “wet parrot” (Crane, 40), making an otherwise threatening confrontation with a superior officer seem comical.

One can mine just about any page of *The Red Badge of Courage* and find gems of writing. One metaphor reads, “Some arrows of scorn had buried themselves in his heart.”



(Crane, 124). On the next page, courage is likened to “an exhilarating fluid” that raised the spirits of the soldiers, but made them “scamper in an insane fever of haste to achieve sudden success”, rushing before the magic of their temporary surge of determination wore off.

All through the text, Crane connects ideas that fire the imagination. He compares the “blue smoke-swallowed” line of battle to a writhing serpent that had been stepped on (99). Its ends swung back and forth with rage.



In another passage, Crane shows how a soldier overcame his fear and became a human fighting machine. Crane deploys lots of mechanical terminology to build this impression. He said the man became “welded” to the purpose of the battle. His regiment was “like a firework,” unstoppable once ignited. His mind ceased to debate, and he worked “with furious haste”, and his weapon firing became “an automatic affair.”

Stephen Crane is a master of metaphor. He paints many vivid word pictures. He speaks of reluctantly retreating cold; roads that were like “long troughs of liquid mud”; writhing serpent-like battle fronts; the evil, “red, eye-like gleam” of “hostile campfires” (11); silly vanity; last minute epiphanies in the shadow of the grave; guilt weighing like a “leaden slab” (196); and the strange chemistry of “blaze, blood, and danger” (21). He shines a penetrating light on the frailty, pretense, paradox, and predicaments of human nature, and gives hope that we can take who we are and in the refining alchemical fire of life’s challenges, become a better version of ourselves.

Works Cited

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage. 7th edition.* Signet Classic. (New York: The New American Library of World Literature), 1952.

Van Doren, Carl. In *The Red Badge of Courage. Back cover review. 7th edition.* Signet Classic. (New York: The New American Library of World Literature), 1952.

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[1] *Blowing cloud with claws.* Horner, A. Adapted from Shutterstock.com 1060001675.

[2] *Angry bird corporal.* Horner, A. Adapted from Angry Bird, Rovio Entertainment LTD and Jon-Erik Gilot, "Why George B. McClellan was the go-to guy, part 1." EmergingCivilWar.com

[3] *Don't tread on me.* Revolutionary War coiled serpent flag icon. Gadsden, Christopher, 1775.