

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky

by
Stephen Crane

Book Information

Stephen Crane, The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky

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The town marshal of Yellow Sky had gone to San Antonio to marry without consulting Yellow Sky for any part of the transaction.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Family Life, Marriage; Series, Creative Short Stories; Short Stories, Short Stories (All); Westerns, Westerns (All)

Main Characters

Jack Potter Yellow Sky's marshal, who returns to town with his new wife

Mrs. Potter Jack's new bride, who is neither pretty nor young

Scratchy Wilson one of the last members of the old gang, who gets drunk and terrorizes Yellow Sky with his gun

the drummer one of the men at the Weary Gentleman saloon

Vocabulary

citadel a fortress in a strategic position near a city

fresco a painting applied on moist plaster with earth colors dissolved in water

mesquite shrubs or small trees found in the southwestern United States and Mexico

precipice a very steep overhanging mass of rock

Synopsis

Jack Potter, the town marshal of Yellow Sky, is returning from San Antonio by train with his new wife. Potter is nervous about returning to his home because he is afraid that the townspeople will not accept the fact that he has taken a bride. On the train, the newly married couple regard each other in a seemingly awkward manner. Though the other

passengers and workers on the train seem to find humor in the new couple's appearance and demeanor, the Potters remain oblivious. When the train stops in Yellow Sky, Potter bids his wife to cling to his arm, and the two begin to make their way home.

Meanwhile, the men in the Weary Gentleman saloon are listening to a drummer who is regaling them with entertaining stories. The drummer's story is cut short by the announcement that Scratchy Wilson is drunk and "has turned loose with both hands." While the other men in the bar begin to prepare for the expected shooting, the drummer, apparently a visitor to the town, asks questions about Scratchy. Finally, the drummer is persuaded to hide behind the bar and wait out the expected violence. Soon, the men hear the sound of a shot followed by three wild screams that tell them Scratchy is getting closer.

As the men cower in the saloon, Scratchy wanders the town in search of a fight. When no one answers his calls, he shoots at a dog. After the dog runs away in terror, he pounds on the locked saloon door, demanding a drink. When no one answers him, he decides to go to Potter's house, as Potter is his "ancient antagonist." He howls a challenge but receives no answer. As Scratchy reloads his revolvers, Potter and his new wife round the corner. Scratchy and Potter stand in stunned silence. When Scratchy tries to persuade Potter to fight, Potter tells him that he does not have his gun with him. Scratchy thinks Potter is lying until Potter reveals that he is not carrying his gun because he is coming home from his wedding. Bewildered, Scratchy picks up his revolvers and walks away.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

Scratchy Wilson is a man who, according to the barkeeper of the saloon, is friendly when sober and despicable when drunk. Why do you think Scratchy acts this way when he is drunk?

It is stated that Scratchy had been part of a gang. Perhaps Scratchy misses some of his old friends and gets drunk to help him forget the present and remember the past. He seems to enjoy the fear he gains when he is drunk that he probably no longer holds when he is sober.

Literary Analysis

Much of this story focuses on the Texas town of Yellow Sky. Why do you think the author chose to set this story in Texas? Do you think the story would have been different if it had been set elsewhere?

This work might not have had the same effect if it had not been set in such a rough and wild setting. By setting the story in Texas, Crane gives the setting itself some character. In many readers' minds, the Texas of that time period was a rowdy and untamed place ruled by gunslingers and outlaws. If Crane had set the story in the polished and sophisticated society of a New England town, the mood of the story would be very different.

Inferential Comprehension

Throughout the story, Potter is concerned that the citizens of Yellow Sky would resent him for getting married. Do you think Potter is right in making this assumption? Why or why not?

It is difficult to know how the citizens will feel. Scratchy Wilson is the only citizen who has any idea that Potter is married. Because he is drunk, his reaction is not necessarily indicative of how the entire town will feel. It is possible that Potter is overreacting, and that the citizens would be surprised, but supportive. However, it is also possible that he has reasons to be concerned. As a marshal, he probably is a good judge of character and may accurately anticipate people's reactions. Also, the judgmental nature of the passengers and workers on the train may be a trait common to people living in that region. Based on the text, it is difficult to know for certain.

Constructing Meaning

Crane writes that while in San Antonio, Potter was, "like a man hidden in the dark. A knife to sever any friendly duty, any form, was easy to his hand in that remote city." In your opinion, what does this statement mean?

Potter is a man who is greatly concerned with the opinions of Yellow Sky's citizens. Yet, while he is in San Antonio, Potter is able to act freely, without much worry of his citizens' opinions. That is why it is so easy for him to get married so quickly. But, once Potter gets onto the train, all of his concerns about the reactions he will receive in Yellow Sky rise back to the surface.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The beginning of this story takes place on a train. Ask your students to research the role of trains in the American West. Then, divide them into small groups and assign a short presentation on a particular aspect of its role. For example, they might explore the railroad's significance in trade and commerce, rapid settlement of Western

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territory, the use of immigrant workers to build the railroads, the rise of railroad tycoons, etc.

Comparing and Contrasting Some people have compared Stephen Crane's work to Edgar Allan Poe's. Ask your students to read one of Poe's short stories. Then ask them to write a short paper comparing and contrasting the mood of the Poe story they chose with that of *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*.

Recognizing Feelings Potter's new wife seems to be a bit uncomfortable in her new role. Ask the students to put themselves in her place. Then, ask them to write a story from her point of view and include her feelings about Yellow Sky.

Responding to Literature There are several humorous and suspenseful scenes within this story. Ask your students to choose their favorite scene and write a short response explaining why they chose it. They should describe the scene and include the emotions they felt as they read it.