

“Soldier’s Home” by Ernest Hemingway

“Soldier’s Home” was originally published in Hemingway's debut 1925 short story collection *In Our Time*, the same book that included the stories “Indian Camp” and “The End of Something.” Given that we are currently reading *The Things They Carried*, it can be interesting to take in Hemingway's portrayal of a young man who has recently returned “home” to the American Midwest after World War I.

Instructions

In the large, silver-spined *Literature* books located on the shelf at the back of the classroom, please **find the start of Ch.7 “Style: the Words That Tell the Story” on pg.340.**

1) Read pg.340-347, paying close attention to what the book says about (a) Diction, (b) Rhetoric, and (c) Style in General. You will need to consider this information as you read “Soldier’s Home.”

2) Read “Soldier’s Home” on pg. 348-352. As you read, consider these questions:

What seems to be Hemingway’s attitude toward Krebs, and how can we tell?

Moreover, which specific techniques—especially techniques involving style—help us *infer* Hemingway’s attitude toward Krebs?

3) Choose two topics from the list of topics below, create a new Google Doc, and then discuss each topic in a well-developed paragraph (i.e, two paragraphs total).

For each topic and paragraph, please identify the topic of each paragraph (by number) first, and incorporate at least two significant quotations from the short story into each paragraph.

TOPICS (Choose two.)

1. What kind of person was Krebs before the war, and how does the story illustrate significant changes in Krebs? What does the description in the first paragraph tell you about him, and why might the narrator mention the detail about the fraternity brothers all “wearing exactly the same height and style collar”? In light of this choice of details on the author's part, how does the Krebs we meet in the story seem like a different person? Which specific details in the story and literary techniques show how Krebs has changed?

2. In paragraph 4, the narrator mentions these battles: “Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel . . . and the Argonne.” *These places were all scenes of some of the most brutal, bloody combat in World War I.* Why might Hemingway include this choice of details in the story, since Krebs never discusses these experiences during the story? How might these war experiences be relevant to Krebs’s main conflicts in the story? What evidence does the story provide regarding what Krebs experienced in these places and how it has affected him?

3. Closely reread paragraphs 10 and 15, and look closely at the language Hemingway uses in each.

Paragraph 10 begins: “Nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up. . . .”

Paragraph 15 begins: “He liked the girls that were walking on the other side of the street. . . .”

In each paragraph, what key words or sentence patterns are repeated, and what does this repetition convey? Moreover, what does this repetition of key words and sentence structures help us understand about Krebs’s state-of-mind and emotional well-being? Is Krebs “okay,” or not? How can we tell?

4. Reread the scene with Krebs and his mother (paragraphs 53-95). This scene parallels the earlier scene with his sister, but his mother's demands provoke a very different reaction from him. What does his mother want from him, and what is she afraid has happened to him? How does she seek to connect with him—and perhaps even attempt to control him—and why doesn't she succeed? Moreover, why do you think Hemingway includes the following choice of details in this scene: "Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening on his plate" (paragraph 67)?

5. This story employs the 3rd-person limited-omniscient point of view. In what key ways would this story's effects be different if Hemingway had chosen to make Krebs the story's 1st-person narrator? Would we find out more about Krebs, or less—i.e., would we understand him better, or worse? By choosing to narrate from the 3rd-person point of view, what does Hemingway emphasize about Krebs and his problems? Speaking of point-of-view, why do you think the narrator calls the protagonist "Krebs," when members of his own family call him "Harold" or "Hare"?

6. Even though Hemingway is often praised for his use of concrete, specific language, there are a number of vague passages in this story—passages that include a number of abstract and general nouns, rather than concrete and specific nouns. What are one or two passages that fit this description, and why do you think Hemingway includes them? What purposes might this vagueness serve in directing how we perceive Krebs?

7. What is one specific aspect of this story that interests and intrigues you—ranging from a key trait of the story's form (such as the story's structure or an important detail or motif that you noticed in it), to any notable aspect of the author's style, to Hemingway's treatment of themes present in other works we have studied (including *The Things They Carried*)? Why is this particular aspect of the story intriguing for you?

8. One of Tim O'Brien's fundamental concerns throughout *The Things They Carried* is human communication, or each human being's ability and need to know another and to make oneself known to another. (Note that the roots of the word "communicate" suggest the idea "to become one with another.")

In what ways does "Soldier's Home" not only illuminate specific stories in *The Things They Carried*, but also illuminate O'Brien's entire novel and connect to his fundamental concerns about human communication?