



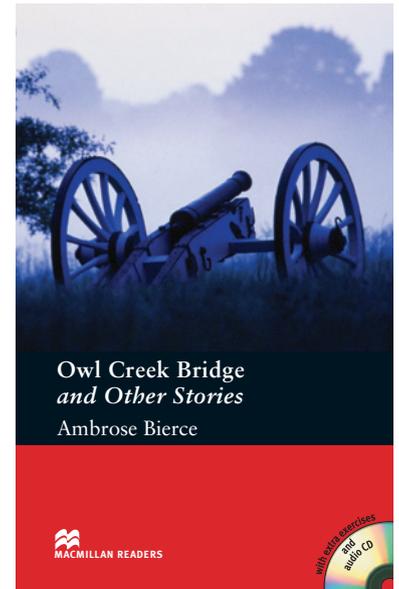
## An Adventure at Brownville by Ambrose Bierce

### ABOUT THE STORY

*An Adventure at Brownville* is a short story set in Brownville, a picturesque little town in California. It's a popular place for holidays in the summer; people love to visit, relax and breathe the clean, country air. The narrator lives in Brownville and teaches at the local school. Life there is calm and nothing ever happens. Or does it? The narrator is in the forest one day and hears something suspicious.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ambrose Bierce was an American journalist and writer. He was born in Meigs County, Ohio in 1842 but he grew up in the state of Indiana. He worked at a printer's until the American Civil War, when he joined the army. After the war, he wrote articles for newspapers, short stories and poems. His short stories feature themes such as war, death, fear, mystery, ghosts, and crimes. His stories often start very unexpectedly and his descriptions, especially of war, are very vivid. His death was as mysterious as many of his short stories – in 1913 he left for Mexico to join the revolution, and he was never seen again. To this day, no one knows what happened to him.



### AN ADVENTURE AT BROWNVILLE

- 1 There was only one school in Brownville and I was the only teacher. Brownville was a small town and had few young people, but many visitors stayed there in the summer.
- 5 Brownville has some of the finest views in the state of California. The town lies between hills that are covered in beautiful, colorful trees. In the hills, the air is fresh and clear. Many visitors came to Brownville to improve their health. They walked on the hills and breathed the good, clean air.
- 2 I saw many of these visitors because I lived in a boarding house. In summer, the house was full of guests and I talked to most of them.
- 15 I ate breakfast and supper in the boarding house and spent the rest of the day at the school.
- 3 The school was not far away. It was on the other side of a hill. The distance by road was about one and a half miles, but I knew a shorter way. I could walk over the top of the hill in fifteen minutes. There was a path that ran through the forest on the hill.

- 4 I came back along this forest path late one evening. It was the last day of term. Tomorrow, the students' vacations would begin. I had stayed late at the school because I had been writing reports about the students.
- 5 The sun was going down in the sky. Its golden light shone through the trees and made long dark shadows. I was tired. I sat down on an old, fallen tree and looked at the sun setting in the darkening sky. It was calm and peaceful in the forest.
- 6 Suddenly I heard voices. One was a woman's voice, and she sounded angry. The second voice belonged to a man. It was a deep and musical voice—the voice of a singer. I could not see who was speaking, but I could hear the words clearly.
- 7 "Don't threaten me!" the man said. "You can do nothing. Don't try to change anything, or you'll both suffer".
- 8 "What do you mean?" said the woman's voice angrily. It was a cultivated voice—she spoke clearly and well. "Do you mean that ..."

### VOCABULARY FOCUS

- boarding house (line 13):** a private house providing food and a bed for paying guests
- guests (line 14):** people who are paying to stay at a hotel
- supper (line 15):** the last main meal of the day, usually an informal meal that you eat at home
- threaten (line 40):** to frighten or pressurise someone
- cultivated (line 44):** well educated and knows how to behave politely



## An Adventure at Brownville by Ambrose Bierce

### Before reading

**1 The style of writing of *An Adventure at Brownville* is descriptive. Look at the features below. Tick the four that are features of descriptive writing.**

- 1 Uses lots of adjectives to describe people, events and surroundings
- 2 Uses simple adjectives where possible
- 3 Uses specific or unusual adjectives
- 4 Uses varied sentence lengths, e.g. short sentences to get the reader's attention
- 5 Uses similes, metaphors and/or comparison to create a picture in the reader's mind
- 6 Uses passive rather than active language

**2 Read the opening lines of the story below. Then think about the following questions. In pairs, predict the answers to the questions.**

There was only one school in Brownville and I was the only teacher. Brownville was a small town and had few young people, but many visitors stayed there in the summer.

- 1 What is Brownville like in the summer? What is it like in the winter?
- 2 What does it look like? What is the surrounding area like?
- 3 Do you think the narrator likes living in Brownville? Why/Why not?

### While reading

**1 Read the text. Match each paragraph (1-8) from the text with its summary (a-h).**

- |             |                        |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Paragraph 1 | a The peace is broken  |
| Paragraph 2 | b Sunset in the forest |
| Paragraph 3 | c Brownville           |
| Paragraph 4 | d A defiant reply      |
| Paragraph 5 | e The boarding house   |
| Paragraph 6 | f The threat           |
| Paragraph 7 | g The forest path      |
| Paragraph 8 | h The school           |

**2 Read the text again. Answer these questions.**

- 1 Why do visitors come to Brownville in the summer?
- 2 Why does the narrator end up talking to so many visitors?
- 3 What is the quickest way for the narrator to get to school?
- 4 What does the narrator hear whilst walking back from school?
- 5 What does he notice about the woman?

**3 Work in pairs. Read the text again and discuss your answers to the questions in Before reading, exercise 2.**

**4 Read the text again. How does the writer describe the following? Think about the different adjectives he uses.**

- Brownville .....
- the forest .....
- the man .....
- the woman .....

### After reading

**1 Work in pairs. Answer these questions about the change of mood in the text.**

- 1 What is the mood of the text at the beginning? How does the author create this mood?
- 2 At what point in the text does the mood change? How does it change?
- 3 Which feature of descriptive writing does the author use to do this?

**2 Work in a small group. Ask and answer the questions. Make notes of your answers.**

- 1 Why do you think the couple are arguing?
- 2 What do you think has happened?
- 3 What do you think will happen next?

**3 Now write another paragraph to continue the story. Use your notes from exercise 2 above. Look back at the features of descriptive writing in Before reading, exercise 1 and try to use these in your paragraph.**