

Literary criticism of "the open boat" assignment

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The Open Boat by Stephen Crane is a story describing four men that are trapped together in a small boat or dingy. The men aboard the boat are a captain, a correspondent, an oiler, and a cook. The men were aboard a larger boat that crashed off the coast of Florida and are now searching for the safety of a light house they remember. After making a homemade sail and some brisk paddling they finally get near the coast. They spot some people and begin to signal for help but the people only respond with friendly waves. The tide is much too strong to swim to shore so they paddle back out to sea a ways and wait for it to calm.

While waiting they get approached by a shark. The large fish circles in such a way that death searches for the next victim it will claim. The men keep rowing and head toward shore. Upon arriving a reasonable distance from the shore, the captain announces that when the boat is about to sink that they will all jump and swim for shore. The oiler, cook, and correspondent evacuate the boat and swim for the sandy beach. The captain stays close to the boat because his injury inhibits his swimming ability. They are having trouble completely the journey to safety when a naked man comes and helps the correspondent and cook on shore.

These two men alongside the captain are warmly welcomed by many. The oiler, however, is only welcomed by a sandy grave. The four men each represent four different members of society. The captain represents the leaders; the cook the followers; the oiler the workers; and the correspondent the observers and thinkers. These men must learn to work together and thrive off of one another's strengths and make up for the other's weaknesses. Each of these men are very different but the fury of nature does

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not discriminate against any man. The narrator of the story is the character of the correspondent. This character is probably a young strong male.

We learn this because he is one of only two people out of the four aboard the boat that paddle. He is also the most intellectually advanced of the men.

While the oiler is paddling the boat and the cook is scared in the bottom of the boat the correspondent is watching the waves and wondering why he has been stranded in the ocean and what the purpose of this is in his life. At the beginning of chapter six the correspondent asks, " If I am going to be drowned-if I am going to be drowned-if I am going to be drowned , why in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Here the correspondent is wondering why he would drown in the dingy if he was able to survive the crash of the ship. This shows the correspondent's reasoning and questions of nature. He seems to understand fate and nature. He knows that they do not operate according to social status or any other human ranking but instead are impartial in their discipline of the world. The captain represents the leaders that exist in society. He never abandons his responsibilities he has had entrusted in him for safety of the men aboard his vessel. The captain is described as being injured during the crash of his ship.

This physical injury stands as a representation of the mental/emotional loss he has suffered. He mentally is set back by the loss of his ship which served as his source of authority. Yet, the captain continues to help the other men get to safety. He puts the other men on the boat such as when the correspondent states, " He dragged ashore the cook, and then waded toward the captain, but the captain waved him away and sent him to the
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correspondent. " This quote shows how the captain is always putting the safety of the other men ahead of his own which is the duty of a true leader. The cook represents the follower.

He must be told what to do and does not represent a very strong character. However, it is completely necessary to have followers in the world. Without these citizens in the world then the leaders would have little to lead. He is given the simple job of keeping the water out of the boat. He never takes a turn rowing and when the narrator describes the shifts he shared with the oiler, he tells how the cook sleeps through many different cycles of shifts and serves the purpose of keeping the other man warm. Even when evacuating the boat the cook must be instructed by the captain on how to row.

From this information we learn that the cook is probably a very ignorant man with little survival skills. The oiler represents the worker or common man. The oiler is the character that best relates to the average citizen. He is a very hard worker and takes direction well. He is the only character that does not lose hope of survival although he is only character that does not survive the journey. The oiler represents strength, heroics, and integrity. The oiler keeps the spirits of the rest of the crew up by example. He never stops rowing or pressing forward.

He also repeats the captain's orders which help to establish the social order that existed at the time. The four men all represent very different figures in society. It is very important that the different men are all on the dingy and only these men because these very different men of various social standards are forced to work together to survive the dangers of being stranded at sea

together. If there was even one other man on the boat it could have thrown off the balance because he could have found similarities with another character which would most likely group them disturbing the balance they have established.

This story also shows that nature does not discriminate according to social classes or moral worth. The captain was most likely looked at as much higher in the society than the cook but while stranded out at sea they were completely equal. Neither was more stranded than the other. The fate of the men also does not lie in matter of who has worked the hardest. This is proved when the oiler who was possibly the hardest working of all of the men on the dingy was killed by the unforgiving ocean.