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Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

Examining an author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to understand the novel more fully.

Ernest Hemingway grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, one of six children. In 1917, the year President Wilson declared war on Germany, Hemingway graduated from high school. Instead of going to college, he became a reporter for a small newspaper. As a journalist, Hemingway learned to write concisely, using active verbs and brief, clear paragraphs. Many young men were entering the military, but Hemingway's vision did not meet military standards. Instead, he applied to the Red Cross as an ambulance driver and, in 1918, found himself in France and then in Italy. *A Farewell to Arms*, published in 1929, draws on the details of his wartime injury, his friendships, and his love affairs.

Discussion Activities

Listen to The Big Read Audio Guide. Students should take notes as they listen. Ask them to present the three most important points they learned from the Audio Guide.

Distribute Reader's Guide essays, "Introduction to the Novel," "Ernest Hemingway, 1899-1961," and "Hemingway and World War I." Divide the class into groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, groups will present what they have learned to the class. Ask students to add creative twists to make their presentations memorable.

Writing Exercise

Have students read Chapter I. Ask students to write a two-page second chapter using this reading. Students can further explore the landscape, or begin to develop the main character. Use this as an opportunity to talk about creative writing.

Homework

Prepare students to read roughly 30 pages per night, so as to complete the novel in ten lessons. Readers first meet a group of soldiers and a priest debating how the narrator should spend his holiday. Why might Hemingway have drawn out this debate at the beginning of the novel? Is the narrator choosing between the soldier's life and a more religious one? Read Chapters I–VII.

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Lesson Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the center of the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating intricate details of the time and place help readers understand the motivations of the characters.

During and after the war, artists, writers, poets, philosophers, and musicians gathered in Paris. Hemingway's Europe hosted American expatriates pursuing inventive forms of expression, challenging traditions, and idealistically embracing a new century. Inevitably, these young thinkers would influence one another through friendship, collaboration, or antagonism.

The American poet Ezra Pound changed Irish writer James Joyce's life by inviting him to come to Paris. Pound, as well as the American writer Gertrude Stein, would also become a mentor to Hemingway. Pound's work, like Hemingway's, would be characterized by concise, clear language that rejected ornament.

Extending such minimalism, the Surrealist Movement came to life in Paris. Visual artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and René Magritte sought to free the human voice by disposing with ideas crafted, revised, and carefully shaped through reason. In 1924, "The Surrealist Manifesto" claimed that automatic responses may hold more truth than statements filtered through layers of reason and revision. A culture, or the collective unconscious, might be revealed, so they thought, through "automatic responses."

Discussion Activities

Read and discuss the Reader's Guide essay "Hemingway and the Lost Generation" and Handout One: World War I—The Great War and Handout Two: Modernism. Play the Surrealist game "exquisite corpse." Google "exquisite corpse" to see samples and learn to play.

Writing Exercise

Henry experiences remorse at neglecting to visit Abruzzi, the priest's hometown. He feels guilty about ignoring the priest's advice. This guilt reflects an internal conflict between following a religious path and following the path where "we did not do the things we wanted to do; we never did such things." Could Hemingway be foreshadowing the outcome of the novel? In which direction might Henry's life unfold? Write a few paragraphs about what you think might happen, based on this fork in the road.

Homework

Read Chapters VIII–XII. How does the main character's point of view emerge in Book One? At this point, is the narrator a hero? Why or why not?

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Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using “I.” A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third person (he, she, and they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters’ thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

American volunteer Frederic Henry tells the story in *A Farewell to Arms*. While Frederic narrates this account, he does not refer to himself until the second chapter of the novel. First, he must orient us to the landscape, the changing seasons, and the shifting war. Similarly, Hemingway waits to reveal Henry’s name until Chapter V, when a nurse bids him goodnight. Note also that this novel takes place before America enters the war. When Henry says, “I believe we should get the war over,” he is referring to his comrades and the Italian forces.

Discussion Activities

In Chapter IX, a heated debate takes place regarding the nature of war, foreshadowing the conflagration that will injure Frederic. There are many views reflected in the heated debate: “nothing worse than war,” “defeat is worse [than war],” “war is not won by victory,” “the ruling class caused and runs the war,” and “war is fought for money.” What position, or point of view, does Henry take regarding war? Does this inform how he tells the story? If so, in what way? If not, why not? In addition, why might Hemingway introduce this debate just before men are injured and killed?

Writing Exercise

Rewrite the novel’s beginning from the point of view of Catherine Barkley, Rinaldi, or the priest. Before writing, decide whether you will write in first-person or third-person narration. If you write in the third person, will the narration be omniscient? Before you begin writing, decide what view of war (see above) informs your character.

Homework

Have students read Chapters XIII–XVIII. This reading concludes with the statement “You’re my religion.” What are Catherine Barkley’s and Frederic Henry’s primary motivations? Come to class with a list of their top three motivations.

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Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The central character in a work of literature is called the protagonist. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw, such as weakness or ignorance, to achieve a new understanding by the work's end. A protagonist who acts with great honor or courage may be called a hero. An antihero is a protagonist lacking these qualities. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, the antihero may be cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The protagonist's journey is enriched by encounters with characters who hold differing beliefs. One such character type, a foil, has traits that contrast with the protagonist's and highlight important features of the main character's personality. The most important foil, the antagonist, opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

We encounter the secondary characters through Henry's point of view. Hemingway does not profile Henry's comrades in great detail. As Henry's lover, Miss Barkley provides the foil for Henry's character, leading him in unexpected directions: "God knows ... I had not wanted to fall in love with any one. But God knows I had and I lay on the bed in the room of the hospital in Milan and all sorts of things went through my head but I felt wonderful."

Discussion Activities

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group a secondary character: Rinaldi, the priest, Miss Gage, or Miss Ferguson. Ask students to review the chapters they have read, selecting the chapter that best captures this character. Have them present the key attributes of that character, citing quotes from the text. Conclude by discussing moments when these characters draw reactions from Henry. Do these characters deepen our understanding of Henry?

Writing Exercise

Who is the antagonist in the novel? Does the antagonist require Henry to look at himself in profound new ways? Write a brief essay answering these questions, supporting your argument with quotes from the text.

Homework

Have students read Chapters XIX–XXIV, concluding Book Two. Hemingway alludes to a poem by Andrew Marvell, when Henry recites: "But at my back I always hear, time's winged chariot hurrying near." Why does Henry recite this poem at this moment in the novel? Why is "time's winged chariot hurrying near?"

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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste)—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

While figurative language provides an essential tool for many writers, Hemingway avoided figurative descriptions. Rather than describing through symbols, images, or metaphors, he preferred to imply change of mood, meaning, or direction subtly. As his work developed, dialogue came to serve as Hemingway's principal tool for breaking open a character, a scene, or a theme.

Discussion Activities

Read Handout Three: Hemingway's Writing Style. Return to the novel and select a section of dialogue to examine closely. For example, what remains unsaid in Henry's exchange with Catherine at the end Chapter XXIII? Discuss this example with the class. Then, allow students a few minutes to review the novel individually and select some dialogue for discussion. How does the dialogue selected imply meaning beyond the words exchanged?

Writing Exercise

Have students write a few paragraphs describing an unusual or exotic place they have visited. In their story, the students should use image, simile, and metaphor at least twice. As another option, have students write a dialogue between themselves and their best friend, a parent, or a relative. When they have finished writing the dialogue, discuss how their experience with dialogue relates to Hemingway's techniques used in the novel.

Homework

Have students read Chapters XXV–XXVII. While reading, reflect on symbols of war that you see in media, novels, or the general culture. Do you find these symbols within the novel as well?

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Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are persons, places, or things in a narrative that have significance beyond a literal understanding. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols to present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal, or figurative, meaning attached to the object. Symbols are often found in the book's title, at the beginning and end of the story, within a profound action, or in the name or personality of a character. The life of a novel is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and reinterpreting the main symbols. By identifying and understanding symbols, readers can reveal new interpretations of the novel.

Hemingway employs symbols deliberately and selectively. We can find an explanation in Henry's comment that "abstract words ... were obscene beside the concrete names of villages." Idealized heroic figures, symbols of victory or defeat, rarely appear in this story. As implied in Henry's quote, in the face of this war, the symbols "were obscene."

The changing seasons reflect Henry's inner development, his developing relationship with Miss Barkley, and the progress of the war. The novel begins in harvest time, when the two lovers meet. They later enjoy a blissful summer in Milan. But the book's second half is filled with uncertainty and death, accompanied by a deluge of rain and snow during the winter of 1917–18. Catherine says, "I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it."

Discussion Activities

Rinaldi says, "I am the snake. I am the snake of reason." Henry responds, "You're getting it mixed. The apple was reason." Rinaldi has "no sacred subjects" and notes that he has no married friends, presumably because he can seduce any woman through reason. Finally he admits, "We are born with all we have and we never learn. We never get anything new. We all start complete." These biblical symbols draw us back into questions of religion. Could Rinaldi provide a symbol of the atheist or a world without religion? Discuss with the class.

Writing Exercise

Have students write a brief essay on either how Rinaldi might symbolize a particular point of view, or how Hemingway portrays religion in the novel. Students should cite references in the text to support their arguments.

Homework

Have students read Chapters XXVIII–XXXII. How might Henry's character (and challenges) reflect the era? Is Henry himself a symbol of the "Lost Generation"? In what way might he fail to represent the Lost Generation?

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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters who encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist may undergo profound change. A close study of character development maps, in each character, the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next and the protagonist's eventual success or failure.

Early in the novel the priest tells us, "It is never hopeless. But sometimes I cannot hope. I try always to hope but sometimes I cannot." While the priest may have no hope at the moment, he does have faith that something will happen to resolve the war. In Book Three, Henry's knee has recovered and he returns to the front. He notes changes in his friends. As the priest says, "Many people have realized the war this summer. Officers whom I thought could never realize it realize it now." Henry and the priest contemplate the hopelessness of the war. Will the war end with no victors, or continue on with no obvious victor? Henry explains to the priest, "It is in defeat that we become Christian We are all gentler now because we are beaten."

Discussion Activities

In this section, Henry implies that he "believes in nothing." Is this view the result of his war experience? Compare Henry's actions and comments in Book One to those in Book Three to determine whether this view has evolved. If this view hasn't evolved from life experience, is Rinaldi correct when he says, "We all start complete"? Is Hemingway giving us a novel based on Rinaldi's philosophy? To further explore this activity, you might present students with the theories of existential philosophy to determine whether Henry may be an existentialist.

Writing Exercise

After shooting a sergeant, being captured, and fleeing, Henry finds solace in memories and remembering. Have students choose one character aside from Henry and write a brief essay on how that character finds solace from the war. Has his or her source of solace changed during the novel?

Homework

Have students read Chapters XXXIII–XXXV. Students should come to class ready to present the two most important turning points in the novel. In this section, we find that Henry makes "a separate peace." What does he mean by this?

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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

Some turning points in the novel include Henry's first meeting with Catherine, the serious wound he suffers at the front, Catherine's unplanned pregnancy, Henry's escape from execution, and Emilio's intercession that allows the couple to escape to Switzerland.

Discussion Activities

Use the homework assignment from the last lesson to have students present the most important turning points in the novel. Ask them to refer to key passages. Use this information for the next activity.

In small groups, have students map a timeline that depicts the development of the story and the building of drama. This should include the most significant turning points, but also examine lesser events that build tension. As students develop their timelines, they should define the beginning, middle, and end of the novel. Groups should present their timelines to the class. You might also divide the thirty-five chapters among students, with each student contributing part of the timeline. Could one delete any chapters and still tell a good story?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to imagine a sequel to *A Farewell to Arms* and have them outline it. What would the beginning, middle, and end of the sequel look like? Then write the opening paragraphs to the sequel, imagining a beginning that plunges the reader into the story. Students should come up with a provocative first sentence.

Homework

Have students read Chapters XXXVI–XXXVII. They should come to class ready to discuss the meaning of the novel. What sort of statement does Hemingway make by telling this story, and by crafting the story in sparse language with frequent dialogue?

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Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.

Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the novel. Using historical references to support ideas, explore the statements *A Farewell to Arms* makes about the following:

Hope/Hopelessness: Hemingway writes, "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates." Henry, in a moment of reflection, explains: "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them."

1. In the first passage, what is Hemingway saying about abstract words?
2. Do the concrete facts of life provide more hope than abstractions?
3. Using several references from the novel, how might hope be a complex state of mind, rather than a simple promise of brighter days?
4. Or, should Henry relinquish any hope in order to survive in the world?

Relationships: Does the novel depict love and friendship? Or are these merely mechanisms to deal with the loss of hope? For example, Rinaldi tells Henry, "You are my best friend and my war brother." Henry describes his relationship with Catherine, "We could feel alone when we were together But we were never lonely and never afraid when we were together."

1. What kind of friendship exists between Rinaldi and Henry? In what passages do we find proof (or disproof) of this friendship?
2. What kind of love exists between Catherine and Henry? Try to prove that they do not love one another. How might you develop and support this argument by citing passages from the text?
3. Using your arguments about friendship and love, explain whether these relationships supply Henry with hope or serve only as an escape from dealing with the hopelessness of his situation.



Homework

Have students finish reading the novel, Chapters XXXVIII–XLI. Ask them to begin their essays, using the Essay Topics. Outlines are due for the next class.

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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Book Great?

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *A Farewell to Arms*? Is this a “great” novel? Make sure you clearly define what you mean by “great.”

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Hemingway provide through Henry? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of Hemingway's generation? How does this voice represent the era of the Lost Generation?

Divide students into groups and have each group determine the primary theme of the novel. Have spokespeople from each group explain the group's decision, supporting the group's conclusions by referencing the text. Compare and contrast differences of opinion that might emerge within the class.

Writing Exercise

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or an essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have each student partner with another to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. Provide students with the characteristics of a well-written essay.

Homework

Students should begin working on their essays. For additional questions, see the Reader's Guide Discussion Questions. Students will turn in outlines and rough drafts during the next class.

World War I—The Great War

World War I (1914–1918) is known by many names: the Great War, “the war of illusions,” “the war to end all wars.” When the shooting finally ended, an estimated 10 million people were dead and 20 million were wounded. It was the war that introduced the deadly arsenal of modern weaponry to soldier and civilian alike.

The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary triggered the war in June of 1914. But the real causes of the conflict go deeper. A brand of aggressive nationalism had taken root across all Europe. Germany, France, and England had become imperial powers with economic rivalries around the globe. The interlocking royal families of Europe created far-flung political alliances and pledged to take sides in case of conflict. Add to this the coming revolutionary struggle in Russia, and all the pieces were in place for a catastrophe.

A four-year conflict followed. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (mostly today’s Turkey) fought against the Allies, led by France, England, Russia, Italy, and, eventually, America. The bulk of the war pitted adversaries along the Western front in a brutal standoff known as trench warfare. The Italian and Eastern fronts, though bloody, were secondary to the decisive battles that consumed the heart of France and Belgium until whole landscapes were devoid of life.

After the Great War, combat would never be the same. The trenches were only one aspect of a conflict that saw the deployment of revolutionary and murderous new technology. The machine gun, the airplane, the armored tank, submarines, and poison gas were used in warfare, most of them for the first time—an arsenal that would dominate military strategy and planning for the century to come.

Though almost all the great battles were fought in Europe—the Marne, the Somme, Verdun, Ypres, Tannenberg—the Great War was a global conflict. Turkey, where the bloody battle of Gallipoli was waged, was a close ally of Germany. Australia and New Zealand entered on the side of the Allies. The United States did not join the Allies until 1917 but played a key role in stopping the final German offensive and bringing the war to an end in November of 1918.

The Great War might have been aptly named had the combatants heeded its warning. But the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, burdening Germany with enormous reparations, was partly responsible for setting in motion the rise of German fascism and the Nazi party. Before the memory of the first great war had dimmed, an even greater threat was on the horizon.



Modernism

Modernism was a movement that revolted against the literature, music, art, and architecture of Western culture. A group of visionaries emerging at the turn of the twentieth century targeted the classical and romantic strains of European tradition as static and passé. Depressed by the militarism and chaos of the Great War, Modernists finally questioned fundamental values such as progress and enlightenment, which had long defined the Western tradition.

Modernism emerged in the visual arts as early as the 1860s, with Édouard Manet. Further developments in the natural and social sciences encouraged a new group of Europeans around the turn of the century. The art of this early modernism was abstract, innovative, and often utopian. The decades to follow saw a proliferation of bold new artists and movements, each challenging those that had come before: Futurism (Boccioni), Dada (Duchamp), Cubism (Braque, Picasso), and Expressionism (Kandinsky).

Literary modernism flourished during the years between the world wars—effectively, the movement’s second generation. Modernist technique in poetry and fiction relied on such devices as shifting perspective, stream-of-consciousness narration, non-linear structure, and symbolic fragmentation. In the hands of James

Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner, the great legacy of the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century realism crumpled beneath the force of a sustained literary revolt.

The struggle for the artistic soul of the West reached out to the built environment as well. International School architects like Le Corbusier and Mies van de Rohe stressed simplicity, transparency, glass, steel, and concrete—an affront to the tradition that extended from systematic classical temples through intricate gothic cathedrals and baroque palaces to the overcrowded urban jungle. The industrial neighborhoods of the West soon heralded the new vision of architects who subscribed to the dictum that “form follows function.”

In the music of Stravinsky, the myth-making of Joyce, or the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Modernism stamped the twentieth century with an indelible mark. Fueled by innovations in the sciences, Modernism critiqued Western tradition until, by mid-century, it had itself become a part of that tradition.



Hemingway's Writing Style

Ernest Hemingway's writing is among the most recognizable and influential prose of the twentieth century. Many critics believe his style was influenced by his days as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, where he had to rely on short sentences and energetic English.

Hemingway's technique is uncomplicated, with plain grammar and easily accessible language. His hallmark is a clean style that eschews adjectives and uses short, rhythmic sentences that concentrate on action rather than reflection. Though his writing is often thought of as "simple," this generalization could not be further from the truth.

He was an obsessive reviser. His work is the result of a careful process of selecting only those elements essential to the story and pruning everything else away. He kept his prose direct and unadorned, employing a technique he termed the "iceberg principle." In *Death in the Afternoon* he wrote, "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

Hemingway is also considered a master of dialogue. The conversations between his characters demonstrate not only communication but also its limits. The way Hemingway's characters speak is sometimes more important than what they say,

because what they choose to say (or leave unsaid) illuminates sources of inner conflict. Sometimes characters say only what they think another character will want to hear. In short, Hemingway captures the complexity of human interaction through subtlety and implication as well as direct discourse.

The writers of Hemingway's generation are often termed "Modernists." Disillusioned by the large number of casualties in World War I, they turned away from the nineteenth-century, Victorian notions of morality and propriety and toward a more existential worldview. Many of the era's most talented writers congregated in Paris. Ezra Pound, considered one of the most significant poets of the Modernist movement, promoted Hemingway's early work, as did F. Scott Fitzgerald, who wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, on Hemingway's behalf.

The powerful impact of Hemingway's writing on other authors continues to this day. Writers as diverse as Bret Easton Ellis, Chuck Palahniuk, Elmore Leonard, and Hunter S. Thompson have credited him with contributing to their styles. Direct, personal writing full of rich imagery was Hemingway's goal. Nearly fifty years after his death, his distinctive prose is still recognizable by its economy and controlled understatement.

