

“The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst pp. 314-324



The Scarlet Ibis was featured on a stamp from the southern Caribbean nation of Grenada, where the bird is found. Grenada is just north of the northern tip of South America where the Scarlet Ibis is also common.

Symbol A symbol is something which has meaning in and of itself and also stands for something else larger than itself. For example, a cross stands for two perpendicular intersecting lines by itself. To Christians, however, a cross stands for Christ and his death, which is the basis of Christian faith.

Allusion A reference to something (often from literature, the Bible or history) in a piece of literature that the author assumes the reader is familiar with. In order to get a full appreciation and understanding of the passage, the reader must be familiar with the reference. You’ll have to find two allusions from “The Scarlet Ibis” to complete this study guide.

1. The story’s tone - Find some words and phrases in the first paragraph (p. 315) that foreshadow (hint ahead of time) the sad tone of the story.

2. Flashback - Go to the “Handbook of Literary Terms” (pp. 967-978) and find the definition of *flashback*. Copy the **boldfaced** part of the definition.

3. Re-read the second paragraph. Explain how that paragraph creates a “flashback bridge” for what follows in the rest of the story.

THE SCARLET IBIS

Awkward But Beautiful

As the picture on the Granadan stamp can attest to, the Scarlet Ibis is a bit strange looking, but it possesses a kind of beauty at the same time.

The Scarlet Ibis is a wading bird, dwelling in the marshes, lakes and shallow coastal waters of Venezuela and Brazil. It is in the same family of birds as the stork, the heron, and the flamingo. Here are some facts about the Scarlet Ibis:

SENSES: Uses sense of touch more than sight in search of food.

FEET/LEGS: Long and pink in color.

BEAK: Slender, slightly curved for ease in locating food in water.

FEEDING BEHAVIOR: The Scarlet Ibis probes into the deep mud in search of food.

SOCIAL UNIT: Highly social birds.

NESTING HABITS: Breeding colonies are nearly always among the great natural fortresses of the coastal mangrove swamps which are remote and difficult to approach. For unknown reasons, they vary the site of the breeding colony year by year, which is unusual for colonial nesters.

EGGS/YOUNG: On a shallow nest of coarse sticks, from 4 to 40 feet above the high water level, the female lays 2 or 3 dull, olive-green or buff colored eggs which are streaked with brown. Both parents incubate and raise the young. When hatched, the young are nearly naked. After 23 days of incubation, they leave the nest and scramble among the mangrove vegetation using their bills and wings as well as their feet in their ungainly but determined exploration. They will learn how to fly at four weeks. These young will get their scarlet plumage over a number of seasons.

Source: Encyclopedia Americana

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4. Consider this statement: *Doodle’s brother killed him. If he hadn’t pushed Doodle to do the things he made him do, Doodle would have lived a longer life. His brother is the same as a murderer.*

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give good reasons for your opinion.

5. Doodle and the Scarlet Ibis - Look back in the story and find similarities between the Scarlet Ibis and Doodle. List them here. You should have at least three similarities showing how the two are alike.

6. THEME - Copy the definition of THEME from your literature bookmark.

Now, read the suggested themes below for “The Scarlet Ibis.” Which one do you think is best, and why do you think it is best? **BE SPECIFIC** with your reasons, and pick only **ONE** theme.

1. Handicapped people shouldn’t be made to do more than they can comfortably do.
2. The **QUALITY** of someone’s life is more important than the **QUANTITY** of that life.
3. Deserting a loved one when he needs you is unforgivable.
4. Brotherly (and sisterly) love can be shown in many different ways.
5. Taking advantage of someone weaker than you is a terrible thing to do, especially when he is your bother.

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7. **ALLUSION** - Go back to page one of this study guide and find the definition of ALLUSION. Copy it below.

After copying the definition of ALLUSION, read the two allusions below and do the same thing we did with the allusion exercise in class: **give the source** of the allusion (what story in literature or Biblical story the passage came from), and then explain **what point the character who made the statement is making** by using the allusion. If you’re not sure what to do, refer back to the exercise on allusions we did in class before we read “The Scarlet Ibis.”

Biblical Allusion

“Aunt Nicey said that, after so much talk, if we produced anything less tremendous than the Resurrection, she was going to be disappointed.” (p. 319, col. 1, para.3)

Source of the Biblical Allusion: _____

What point is Aunt Nicey trying to make? _____

Literary Allusion

“It was too late to turn back, for we had both wandered too far into a net of expectations and had left no crumbs behind.” (p. 321 column 1, para. 5)

Source of the Literary Allusion: _____

What point is the narrator (the older brother) trying to make? _____
