

## “The Killers” by Ernest Hemingway: Notes and Questions for Discussion and Writing

Hemingway’s stories are most famous for the simple yet powerful style he pioneered, often referred to as an “elliptical style” because of the omission of information that a more traditional writer would convey to the reader directly. (*Ellipses* are the punctuation mark [...] used to indicate missing text.) The reader must *infer* such information as the meaning and tone of the story, and the emotions of its characters, from carefully placed clues because the narrator does not provide rich descriptions to make these aspects of the story obvious. When skillfully executed, this style can give the story greater intensity and vividness, in part because it demands the use of critical thinking skills and engages the reader’s own imagination to fill in many details.

Carefully consider how the following elements of Hemingway's elliptical style contribute to this story's meaning:

- **Plot:** What information do the developments in the story convey?
- **Dialogue:** the flow, style, and content of the exchanges between the characters
- **Point of view:** How would you describe the narrator’s point of view, and how does it contribute to the stylistic effect of the story?
- **Syntax:** sentence structure (How is it distinctive?)
- **Symbolism:** the deeper meaning of some objects and images
- **Contrast:** including moments of absurdity expressed by a contrast between what is expected and what is actually said or what actually happens
- **Understatement:** the opposite of exaggeration—What is its effect?
- **Sparse descriptions:** What details are given by the narrator (and emphasized by the terseness of the description), and what critical information do they reveal?

In "The Killers," pay special attention to diction and to the ways in which Hemingway builds up the tension of the scene. What's remarkable about this story is that although no violence actually occurs, the tension caused by the implication of violence is enough to make the story powerful and chilling. How does Hemingway accomplish this?

What do you think is the point or meaning of the story?