

Study Guide: "An Ominous Baby" by Stephen Crane

1. What does ominous mean? Does this word seem appropriate to describe a baby or toddler?
2. What do the details "tattered," "frowsled [disordered, messy]" "soiled" and "showed the marks of many conflicts" tell us about the wandering toddler?
3. What does "stolid" mean?
4. What does this word imply about the neighborhood through which the "baby" is wandering?
5. What do the lines "Carriages went with a musical rumble over the smooth asphalt. A man with a chrysanthemum was going up steps. Two nursery-maids chatted as they slowly..." tell us about the neighborhood?
6. What does Crane mean when he says the toddler is "wandering in a strange country"? Is he actually in another country? Explain.
7. Look again at Crane's description of the neighborhood in the story in #5 above. Below, in a similar fashion to Crane's description of the neighborhood the "baby" wanders into, write a brief description of the neighborhood you imagine the wandering toddler to be **from**.

continued on reverse

8. What is the first thing said to the wandering toddler in the story? Who says it?
9. What is attitude of the “pretty child in fine clothes” toward the wandering toddler? (“He bended his head...”)
10. What conflict arises, and why?
11. How did this child get his fire engine?
12. Why isn’t the child with the truck a sympathetic character—why isn’t the reader on his side?
13. What *clues* are there in the story that the wandering toddler might *not* have taken the truck of the “pretty child” had shared it with him.
14. Write a brief argument to support the following statement: “The wandering toddler is now the rightful owner of the toy truck.”
15. Explain what this story has to say about class divisions in 1890s America.
16. What may be seen as IRONIC about Crane’s title for the story, “An Ominous Baby”?
17. In what ways is this story still relevant to today’s America?