

## Ponce Inlet Museum Question and Answer Summary Regarding *The Open Boat*

### 1. Why was American author Stephen Crane aboard *The Commodore*?

Crane was a reporter who also had a taste for adventure. During this time, there was conflict in Cuba and he posed as a sailor to be able to get down to Cuba and report on the conflict. Despite having written the *The Red Badge of Courage*, a war novel, he had never actually seen combat and this was an opportunity to witness it firsthand.

2. There are several “literary/conflict” themes running through *The Open Boat*. Which is Crane’s major theme, and does it mirror other mid, late nineteenth, and twentieth century American authors? Name a few examples of related works.

Crane’s major theme is how nature is indifferent to the presence of mankind. This is shown in the descriptions of the ocean throughout the story. At the beginning, it is described in a much more dramatic way than later in the story, despite the ocean being stormy the entire way through. This theme is also present in some works of Ernest Hemingway, who was majorly influenced by Crane’s works (ex. *The Old Man and the Sea*)

3. Describe why the American public was so excited by the illegal actions taken by filibustering ships like *The Commodore*.

The excitement came from the romanization of these events. At the time of the conflict in Cuba, the action of filibustering (gun-running) seemed like a noble and adventurous thing to do.

4. Why has “The Open Boat” been called the perfect American short story? Define what a short story is.

A short story is a story that is fully developed, like a novel would be, but is typically centered around one major idea in one setting, with only a few characters. *The Open Boat* has been described as being the perfect short story. It embodies all these characteristics, in addition to being written from firsthand experience, while being extremely honest.

5. Why does Crane call the character of the oiler by his name, Billie, and the others: the Captain, the Cook, and the Correspondent?

Crane is humanizing the only character who dies in the story, Billie. The others, he deliberately leaves unnamed to emphasize the fact that Billie is named.

## Information Summary

The Ponce Inlet Lighthouse was once called the Mosquito Inlet Lighthouse. This name changed in 1927 because “Mosquito Inlet” would not attract tourists, to both the lighthouse and the surrounding town. Since its construction, the lighthouse had been privately managed up until 1939 when the United States Coast Guard took over its service. Construction first began in 1885 when 2 million bricks were ordered for its construction. Because these bricks were difficult to ship (first they were loaded onto trains and hauled across the country, then moved onto boats to be able to reach Ponce Inlet), only 1.65 million of them made it to the actual construction site. The lighthouse structure is only made of bricks. There are no steel reinforcements because the high humidity of Florida’s climate and the salt spray from the ocean would quickly corrode any steel beams. The lighthouse stands 175 feet tall. This is taller than average because off the coast in that area, there are many sand bars present, and because of that the shipping lanes are 9 miles out. It was constructed to eliminate the “dark coast” that existed between the St. Augustine lighthouse and the Cape Canaveral lighthouse. One fact the Ponce Inlet lighthouse is well known for is the shipwreck of *The Commodore* located not far offshore from it. Stephen Crane’s short story *The Open Boat*, is based on this event. Another fact about the lighthouse was that its surrounding buildings housed the lighthouse keeper’s and the assistant lighthouse keeper’s families. This was an unusual design because most lighthouse keepers lived in the lighthouse for months at a time and were generally at quite a distance from their families. Today, the lighthouse is still operational. Other than a few periods of downtime in its history, it continues to aid in the navigation of ships as it was constructed to do in the late 1880’s.



