

The Things They Carried- Tim O'Brien

Summer Reading Writing Exercise

Due: first day of school-NO exceptions

Answer ALL these questions as completely as possible on your own; find examples from the text to support your ideas. Later you will discuss your answers in small groups and prepare to share your discussion with the class. Take careful notes on the work of other groups, as you may discover some useful insights for your own text-based essay.

I. Actors/Characters

1. Choose 5 of the most important characters from the book. Choose one key action for each of those characters. What does that action tell you about the kind of person he or she is?
2. O'Brien provides only a few female characters in the book. List them and describe their role or purpose in the narrative. What conclusions can you draw based on the evidence you discover?

II. Agency/How

1. How are the conditions different for soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War vs the conditions for those fighting the Iraq War? How might these differing conditions increase or decrease the sense of isolation, alienation, and loneliness for the soldiers?
2. How did Ted Lavendar, Curt Lemon, the VietCong soldier, and Kiowa die? What do their deaths have in common? How does Linda's death fit in?
3. Describe the range of reactions the soldiers exhibit to their experiences. How do they cope with these experiences?

III. Act/What

1. Describe 3 actions that led to deadly consequences and explain how the characters involved were affected by those actions.
2. Lt. Cross burns Martha's letters & photos at the end of "The Things They Carried." What could Martha symbolize, and therefore what could Lt. Cross's action mean?
3. What do Tim's actions demonstrate about his personality over the course of the book? Based on his actions, what can you say about his character, values, beliefs?

IV. Scene/Where-When:

1. How does the landscape of Vietnam play a role in these stories? Give examples.
2. If these stories, which take place in the late sixties, took place today, how would they be different? What has changed, especially in terms of our expectations about gender roles and the emotional lives of men?
3. Find at least 4 examples of juxtaposed images of beauty and horror. What can you conclude from these examples?

V. Motive/Why

1. Why did O'Brien go to the Vietnam War? Why does he consider this an act of cowardice? What do you think motivates young men and women to go to war today?
2. What motivates the soldiers' actions? List three actions and try to explain the motivation in each case. What is the role of masculine gender expectations in their actions?
3. Why did O'Brien write this book? Why do you think he wrote it as a "work of fiction" rather than as an autobiographical work, or a memoir?