

Approved for use in English III

Summary of the Work:

Tim O'Brien's memoir of stories about the Vietnamese war is told with a survivor's deep feelings for the people he fought with and the experiences which linger in his mind. As O'Brien says, "They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing—these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried the common secret of cowardice.... Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to." As a study of writing it is a powerful work; reality and fiction blur, and as O'Brien freely admits, many of the tales he relates never happened. What is history but the story that survives? What happens in the mind is as powerful as what happens in reality; this is a point of *The Things They Carried*.

Rationale:

The Things they Carried is a war story, memoir, and collection of short stories all artfully blended. Particularly, it is about the Vietnamese War, a conflict of moral dilemma, pain, and suffering.

"O'Brien's meditations – on war and memory, on darkness and light – suffuses the entire work with a kind of poetic form, making for a highly original, fully realized novel. . . Beautifully honest. . . . This book is persuasive in its desperate hope that stories can save us." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"*The Things They Carried* is more than 'another' book about Vietnam.... It is a master stroke of form and imagery.... *The Things They Carried* is about life, about men who [fight] and die, about buddies, and about a lost innocence that might be recaptured through the memory of stories. O'Brien tells us these stories because he must. He tells them as they have never been told before." (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*)

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- Wilson's Senior High School 11/01/02
- School Library Journal
- New York Times
- Books for the Teen Age (NYPL) 05/01/04
- Wilson's Fiction 01/01/96
- Publishers Weekly
- Library Journal
- Booklist

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- France's Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger
- Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize
- finalist for Pulitzer Prize
- finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 880
- Readability Level: 9

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: March 2008

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Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Tim O'Brien is a writer and combat veteran of the Vietnam War. Not only does he focus on the effects of war situations as a soldier, but also as the book progresses he shares the activity of storytelling and writing. As such the book serves as a model for students of how to write memoir. While there are some truly disturbing, graphic, and violent scenes, there are also scenes that are haunting, funny, surreal, or ironic.

Connection to the Curriculum:

The Things They Carried deals with events before, during, and after the Vietnamese War. The memoir complements the English III student's study of American literature and history.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)