

*The Things They Carried*  
Tim O'Brien

**Syllabus**

Reading Assignment:

1. "The Things They Carried", "Love", "Stockings"
2. "On The Rainy River", "The Dentist"
3. "Spin", "How To Tell A True War Story", "Style"
4. "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong", "Church"
5. "The Man I Killed", "Ambush", "Speaking of Courage", "Notes"
6. "Friends", "Enemies", "In The Field", "Field Trip"
7. "The Ghost Soldiers", "Night Life"
8. "Good Form", "The Lives of the Dead"

Writing Assignments:

For each reading assignment you will need to respond to the connected questions. These responses should be **1 page typed, 1.5 spaced**. You will also need to have at least two quotes, cited properly to support your ideas. Be prepared for a quiz every class.

1. Make a list of the five most important things the soldiers carry. Write an explanation of why each of these five things (tangible or intangible) is important to the character the item is connected with in the book.
2. Find quotes and ideas that define O'Brien's message about the role of shame, courage, and pride in relation to war and individuality.
3. What makes a war story true? **Find and defend** the four most important characteristics needed for the story to be true? Relate the four characteristics to a section of "Spin" to prove its truth.
4. Chart Mary Anne's progression throughout the chapter from landing in Vietnam to dissipating into the jungle. What causes Mary Anne's transformation? Provide examples to support your opinion. What are the implications of this story—why did O'Brien write this story?
5. Explain how the Vietnamese soldier's death is beautiful and explain why you think O'Brien made the description vivid. To do this provide two "beautiful" examples from "The Man I Killed" and explain the purpose of each.

And

- Agree or disagree: Norman Bowker is courageous. Explain your reasoning through a close examination of "Speaking of Courage" and "Notes".
6. In describing the field where Kiowa dies, O'Brien states that "for twenty years this field had embodied all the waste that was Vietnam, all the vulgarity and horror" (O'Brien, 185). In examining these four chapters, highlight three "things" (tangible or intangible) that were sucked under the field the night Kiowa died? For each explain what, how, and why the loss is crippling to those affected.
  7. Based on these two stories, and all the stories prior, which three emotions and/or personality traits are vital to surviving war? Explain how each is present in this reading section and throughout the novel and how the emotion/trait impacts (either positively or negatively) the soldiers.
  8. Define and explain happening truth and story truth. Explain why the last story in a "war novel" isn't about war? Defend its inclusion in this novel—its purpose?