

Reading Preparation before Class

Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried"

Please read Tim O'Brien's short story "**The Things They Carried**" before coming to class.

As you read, do not treat the story only as a war story. Pay attention to how the story uses **objects, repetition, memory, fear, love, guilt, and responsibility** to show what soldiers carry both physically and emotionally.

While Reading

Please focus on the following points:

The things soldiers carry

Mark several objects carried by the soldiers, such as weapons, letters, photographs, food, medicine, or personal items. Ask what each object tells us about the person who carries it.

The repeated phrase "they carried"

Notice how often this phrase appears. Think about why Tim O'Brien repeats it and how its meaning changes during the story.

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross

Pay special attention to Jimmy Cross, his feelings for Martha, and his reaction after Ted Lavender's death. Ask whether he is truly responsible for Lavender's death, or whether he only feels responsible.

Physical and emotional burdens

Separate the things that are physically heavy from the things that are emotionally heavy. Consider how fear, shame, guilt, memory, and love can also become burdens.

Perspective

Remember that the story is told mainly from the perspective of American soldiers in Vietnam. Think about whose experiences are shown clearly and whose experiences remain outside the story.

Bring to Class

Please bring:

- one passage about physical objects the soldiers carry;
- one passage about Jimmy Cross, Martha, or Ted Lavender;
- one example of repetition in the story;
- one sentence explaining how the meaning of "carry" changes;
- one question you still find difficult to answer.

Main Question for Class Discussion

How does Tim O'Brien turn a list of objects into a story about emotional and moral burden?