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Activity Pack
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The Things They Carried

BY TIM O'BRIEN



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Research, Presentations, and Posters

Objectives: Researching topics to provide a context for our reading of *The Things They Carried*
Presenting research to the rest of the class

Activity

The Things They Carried is an historical as well as an autobiographical novel, and it will help us to learn a bit more about the events and people that shaped the Vietnam War before we begin reading. To this end, your team will be assigned one of the topics below to research and will prepare a 5-minute presentation to deliver in class on that topic. Your team must also prepare a poster to be used during the presentation and displayed in the classroom for the duration of our unit on *The Things They Carried*. Posters should cover key points about your topic and may include photographs, illustrations, graphs, and whatever other visual aids you deem appropriate.

Topics for Research:

- My Lai and Lieutenant William Calley
- Vietnam War Protesters in America, (including those at Kent State University)
- Ho Chi Minh
- The Ho Chi Minh Trail
- The National Liberation Front
- Ngo Dinh Diem
- The Tet Offensive
- The Draft
- The Gulf of Tonkin Incident and Resolution
- Rolling Thunder
- Operation Phoenix
- Agent Orange and Operation Ranchhand
- Lyndon B. Johnson and the Vietnam War
- The Pentagon Papers
- Vietnam Vets and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Love”**Interviews**

Objective: Interviewing a subject who lived through the Vietnam War

Activity

In “Love,” O’Brien and Cross meet to look back over their experiences in Vietnam.

Interview a person who was either a teenager or an adult in America or Vietnam during the war. During your interview, ask your subject the following three **Required Interview Questions** and another **five** questions of your own devising. When finished, you will be responsible for turning in:

- a list of the additional five questions you asked your subject, and
- a one-page write-up of what you learned from your subject.

Be prepared to share details and anecdotes from your interview in a class discussion to take place on _____.

REQUIRED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did you support or oppose American involvement in the Vietnam War? How did you show your support or opposition?
2. Were you drafted, or did you know anyone (even as an acquaintance) who was? How did you or your acquaintance handle being drafted?
3. Since the Vietnam War, do you think the United States has gotten or ever will get into “another Vietnam”?

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Spin”**Group Poem**

Objective: Writing creatively and collaboratively

Activity

In this chapter, O'Brien writes,

Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story.

With your group, discuss what stories are “for” for you—what functions they serve in your own lives, whether they are family stories handed down through generations or stories you tell your friends about what happened last weekend.

Then, one by one, invent your own “Stories are for...” statements. Choose a group member to record the statements down line by line (as lines are arranged in a poem), rather than fitting them into a paragraph of prose. Continue the process until each group member has contributed at least four “Stories are for...” statements.

Feel free to be creative with your statements!

Examples of possible statements:

- Stories are for decorating a Christmas tree.
- Stories are for making you drop the phone out of laughter.
- Stories are for music to make s'mores to.

Now that you have a group poem written down (it does *not* have to rhyme), work together as a group to come up with the poem's title. Write a title beginning “Stories are for,” and finishing with the phrase your group decides on. You might choose a phrase that gets at the heart of or sums up your entire group's contributions to the poem.

Be prepared to share your poem with the class.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“How to Tell a True War Story”

Collage

Objective: Interpreting a principle artistically

Activity

The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. You stare out at tracer rounds unwinding through the dark like red ribbons. You crouch in ambush as a cool, impassive moon rises over the nighttime paddies. You admire the fluid symmetries of troops on the move, the harmonies of sound and shape and proportion, the great sheets of metal-fire streaming down from a gunship, the illumination rounds, the white phosphorus, the purple orange glow of napalm, the rocket's red glare. It's not pretty, exactly. It's astonishing. It fills the eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not. Like a killer forest fire, like cancer under a microscope, any battle or bombing raid or artillery barrage has the aesthetic purity of absolute moral indifference—a powerful, implacable beauty—and a true war story will tell the truth about this, though the truth is ugly.

—from “How to Tell a True War Story”

In a sentence or two, describe what you think O'Brien means by the phrase “the aesthetic purity of absolute moral indifference.”

Using images you have created yourself, images from magazines and the Internet, or both, create a collage that articulates the “beauty” of one of the following:

- illness (in general or in particular)
- war
- poverty

Your collage must measure at least 11x17 inches and must not include any text. Rather allow the juxtaposed images to speak together and for themselves.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“The Man I Killed”**Anaphora****Objective:** Understanding and identifying anaphora**Activity**

Anaphora (pronounced ann-AFF-or-uh) is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginnings of successive lines, clauses, or sentences. O’Brien makes extensive use of the device in “The Man I Killed.”

Read the following passages and comment, in a sentence or two, on the effect each writer’s use of anaphora creates. If it helps, try reading each passage *omitting* the repeated word or phrase; this will give you a sense of what is “lost” when anaphora is not used.

Passage 1:

“We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.” (Winston Churchill)

Effect of Anaphora in Passage 1: _____

Passage 2:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’ I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.” (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Effect of Anaphora in Passage 2: _____

