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Sample

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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Things They Carried

by Tim O'Brien

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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A Short Summary of Tim O'Brien's Life

Tim O'Brien, (born 1946), is credited with writing the essential fictional book about Vietnam. *The Things They Carried* is the winner of France's prestigious Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger and the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize; it was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. O'Brien was raised in small-town Minnesota; his father was an insurance salesman, and his mother was an elementary school teacher. He served as an infantryman in the Quang Ngai province from 1969-70. Many stories had been published by the time he returned home. In 1973, he published *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and began working for the *Washington Post*. After a year with the *Post*, he began writing books. His other titles include *Going After Cacciato*, *In the Lake of the Woods*, *The Nuclear Age*, and many other short stories and articles.

Note to teachers: There is strong language and very gory, graphic scenes in this novel. Due to the subject matter, the Vietnam War, the language and detail is necessary to depict the emotion and confusion the soldiers must have felt during such a painful period. The language, wartime, violence, and gore should be discussed before beginning the book.

All references come from the Broadway Books edition of *The Things They Carried*, copyright 1990.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the author's writing style
2. recognize the dual first-person narration of Tim the character and Tim the author
3. discuss the pros and cons of going to war
4. define and cite instances from the book of the following literary terms:
 - flashback
 - sensory images
 - irony
5. place *The Things They Carried* in its correct chronological period and understand how the events helped mold O'Brien's life
6. discuss various aspects of O'Brien's writing style
7. recognize the importance of "story truth" and "historical truth."
8. discuss the purpose of storytelling
9. understand a soldier's experience at war
10. recognize some elements of a "true war story."

The Things They Carried

Chapter One

The Things They Carried

VOCABULARY

confiscate—to seize
dysentery—a disorder of the lower intestinal tract
foxhole—a shallow pit dug by a soldier in combat
grunts—infantrymen
hump—to carry on the back (slang)
interval—a space between
laxity—laziness
malaria—an infectious disease spread by mosquitoes
platoon—subdivision of a company of troops
rucksack—backpack

1. Give a description of Martha. How do Martha and Jimmy Cross feel about each other?

2. Why is it significant that Martha never mentions the war in her letters? What does she represent?

3. List some items that the men carry. How do certain items reflect the individual?

4. What does the author intend by relaying the weights of all the items the men carry?

Chapter Six

Friends

VOCABULARY

dustoff—a helicopter picking up dead bodies from the war (slang)
tourniquet—a device or tightly encircled bandage used to stop bleeding

1. Who are the friends in this chapter?

2. What is the contract that the two friends make with each other? How is this contract peculiar?

3. What happens to Strunk?

4. Do Strunk and Jensen keep their pact with one another?

5. Explain why the news of Strunk’s death “seemed to relieve Dave Jensen of an enormous relief.”

Chapter Fourteen

Style

1. Why is the girl dancing?

2. Why does the girl cover her ears when she is dancing?

3. Why does Dobbins get upset with Azar?

4. Why does Tim O'Brien include this chapter?
