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English 4

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien: ISBN 978-0-618-70641-9

Summer Reading Requirements

1. **Reading Guide** (Answer only the questions assigned to your group [based on last name]): **two 100-pt. daily grades**, emailed to Mrs. Fields by 8 a.m. on first day of school (**Wed., Aug. 9**). See directions for more information.

Note: You must answer in complete sentences to get credit.

(Attached below.)

2. **Dialectical Journal** (15 entries): **two 100-pt. quiz grades** (7 pts. per entry), submitted at the beginning of class on first day of school (**Wed., Aug. 9**)

(Guidelines attached below.)

Note: I'll deduct points for any entry that's skimpy or that clearly has no thought behind it. Look at sample entries on Dialectical Journal Guidelines to see what I'm looking for. **If you are in doubt about whether your entry is strong enough, email me!**

What to Expect When School Starts

1. Quiz--Know all plot events, characters, and names of places.

Format: Multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short answer--100-pt. quiz grade on first full day of school (**Thurs., Aug. 10**)

*****Recommended:** See Character List (alphabetized) at bottom of this document. As you read, list important points about each character (appearance, what he/she carries, personality traits, etc.). You will not submit this for a grade, but it will help you to do well on quiz and test.

2. Test--Know all plot events, characters, and names of places; analyze themes or deeper meanings of novel in essay

Format: Multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, essay--100-pt. test grade (end of first full week of school or beginning of second)

The Things They Carried Reading Guide

For quiz and test purposes, you're responsible for knowing answers to all questions.

For the reading guide **grade** (150-pt. daily grade), **answer ONLY the questions assigned to your GROUP.**

Answer the questions with **originality and intelligent insight**. **To get credit, you must answer in COMPLETE SENTENCES.**

NOTE: A-M inside parentheses correspond to the chapters in the book, listed below.

GROUP 1: Last name begins with A-F. (A: 1, 5; B: 1; C: 1, 5; D: 3; E: 1, 5, 9; F: 1, 6; G: 1; H: 1; I: 1; J: 1, 5, 9; K: 1, 5; L: 2, 6; M: 1, 5)

GROUP 2: Last name begins with G-L. (A: 2, 6; B: 2, 5; C: 2, 6; D: 3; E: 2, 6; F: 2; G: 1; H: 2, 5; I: 2; J: 2, 6, 10; K: 2, 6; L: 3, 7; M: 2, 6)

GROUP 3: Last name begins with M-R. (A: 3, 7; B: 3; C: 3, 7, 9; D: 1; E: 3, 7, 11; F: 3; G: 2; H: 3, 6; I: 3; J: 3, 7, 11; K: 3, 7; L: 4; M: 3, 7)

GROUP 4: Last name begins with S-Z. (A: 4, 8; B: 4; C: 4, 8; D: 2; E: 4, 8, 12; F: 4, 5; G: 2; H: 4; I: 3; J: 4, 8, 12, 13; K: 4; L: 1, 5; M: 4)

(23 questions for each group)

1. Type your answers in **bright blue** or **red** onto this document and email to me by 8:00 a.m. on the first day of school. **I will not accept work after Aug. 10. Work turned in after 8 a.m. on the first day of school will receive a 40% late penalty.**
2. Save document as follows: Your Last Name RG (Reading Guide) > Jones RG

WARNING: I've caught dozens of students who claimed to have worked together and had essentially the same answers. All students with the same answers get zeroes. A word change here or there still constitutes cheating. *Don't work together* on these answers, and *don't share your answers with anyone else.*

A. The Things They Carried:

1. Why does Jimmy construct (in his mind) this elaborate relationship with Martha? What does he get out of it?
2. When is Jimmy most likely to think about Martha? Why is he thinking about her while one of his platoon members is in the tunnel?
3. In what sense is he responsible for Ted Lavender's death? How is he not responsible for it?
4. Here is his excuse for allowing his men to be lax: "He was just a kid at war, in love." In what sense does this excuse absolve him of guilt? In what sense does it not?
5. Why do the soldiers tell jokes about war, about killing? Why do they use profanity?
6. How is the idea of weight used and developed in this story ("Jungle boots, 2.1 pounds")? What effect does reading those lists of weights have on you as a reader?
7. If this is a story about sacrifice, what does Jimmy sacrifice and why?
8. How has Jimmy changed by the end of the story? Or, to put it another way, what has he lost and what has he gained?
9. How do you think the war will affect Jimmy now that he refuses to think about Martha? What does "Martha" save him from?

B. Love and Spin:

1. What does Jimmy Cross carry AFTER the war, both physically and emotionally?
2. What do you think O'Brien is referring to with the title "Love?" What kind of love was he thinking about and between whom? Jimmy and Martha? Jimmy and the platoon? Jimmy and Tim? Tim and his work? Love of country? Explain your reasoning.
3. What do you think that the narrator means when he says you could put a "fancy spin on it, you could make it dance" regarding the war?
4. What is the average age of the soldiers in the narrator's platoon?
5. What does Tim, the narrator, say the role of stories is?

C. On the Rainy River:

1. How do the opening sentences prepare you for the story: "This is one story I've never told before. Not to anyone"? What effect do they have on you as the reader?
2. Why does O'Brien relate his experience as a pig declotter? How does this information contribute to the story? Why go into such specific detail?

3. How does the Vietnam War seem morally wrong to O'Brien (the narrator)?
4. After receiving his draft notice, the narrator experiences a variety of new emotions. What are these emotions, and what do they cause him to do?
5. What is Elroy Berdahl's role in this story? How would this story be different if would this young Tim O'Brien had simply headed off to Canada by himself, without meeting another person?
6. After his time with Elroy, why does the narrator realize that Canada is not an option for him? Explain.
7. At the story's close, O'Brien almost jumps ship to Canada, but doesn't: "I did try. It just wasn't possible" (61). What has O'Brien learned about himself, and how does he return home a changed person?
8. In the last paragraph of Chapter 4, the narrator says, "I was a coward. I went to war." This a starkly different idea from the one most people have, which is that going to war takes courage. Why do you think O'Brien believes it is cowardly to go to Vietnam rather than stay home?
9. Why, ultimately, does he go to war? Can you imagine any other reasons for going that he doesn't list?

D. Enemies and Friends:

1. What agreement do Jensen and Strunk make in Chapter 6?
2. Why does Dave Jensen break his own nose?
3. Why is Jensen relieved of "an enormous weight" when he learns that Strunk has died?

E. How To Tell a True War Story and Dentist:

1. Why does this story begin with the line: “This is true”? How does that make you, as a reader, perceive what you are about to hear?
2. In this story O’Brien relates a number of episodes. How does O’Brien lull you into the belief that each of these episodes is true?
3. Find a few of O’Brien’s elements of a “true war story” (such as, “A true war story is never moral”). Why does O’Brien believe these elements are important to a “true” war story?
4. In what sense is a “true” war story actually true? That is, in O’Brien’s terms, what is the relationship between historical truth and fictional truth? Do you agree with his assessment that fictional truth and historical truth do not need to be the same thing?
5. According to O’Brien, why are stories important? What do we, as people, need from stories – both reading them and telling them?
6. Why is the baby water buffalo scene more disturbing than the death of one of O’Brien’s platoon members, Dave Jensen?
7. Why does Rat Kiley torture and kill the baby water buffalo? What is going on with him emotionally?
8. Explain how, according to the narrator, war can be both ugly and beautiful.
9. O’Brien explains that this story is “not a war story. It was a love story.” In what sense is this a “love story”?
10. Finally, O’Brien says that “none of it happened. None of it. And even if it did happen, it didn’t happen in the mountains, it happened in this little village on the Bantangan Peninsula, and it was raining like crazy [...]” If O’Brien is not trying to communicate historical fact, what is he trying to communicate? Why change the details? What kind of truth is he trying to relate, and why is the truth set apart from historical truth? Is it OK that this “true” war story may or may not be entirely true?
11. What additional things does Tim O’Brien say about war stories at the end of this chapter?

12. Why does Curt Lemon want his tooth pulled?

F. Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong:

1. How is this or is this not a love story? Who is the main character, and why?

2. Again, this story plays with truth. In the first paragraph, O'Brien says, "I heard it from Rat Kiley, who swore up and down to its truth, although in the end, I'll admit, that doesn't amount to much of a warranty."

By suggesting that Rat's story may not be true, how is or is this NOT a "true war story" as O'Brien has defined it earlier?

3. How does O'Brien use concrete details to show Mary Anne's change? (Think of her gestures, her clothes, her behavior, her looks.) How, specifically, has she changed? And why?

4. Why do you think O'Brien keeps stopping the story so that other characters can comment on it? How do these other conversations affect your perception of Mary Anne's story?

5. Does it matter what happens in the end to Mary Anne? Would this be a better story if we knew, precisely, what happens to her after she leaves camp? Why or why not?

6. Why do you think she changes? What does the change symbolize perhaps on a larger scale?

G. Stockings and Church:

1. Why does Henry Dobbins continue to carry his girlfriend's stockings even after she breaks up with him?

2. What is Kiowa's reaction to setting up camp in a pagoda? Why?

H. The Man I Killed and Ambush and Good Form:

1. When Tim O'Brien introduces the subject of "The Man I Killed," he does it with the following description: "His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a star-shaped whole, his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's, his nose was undamaged, there was a slight tear at the lobe of one ear, his clean black hair was swept upward into a cowlick at the rear of the skull," etc. Why does he use these details?

2. "The Man I Killed" describes fairly intimate aspects of the dead man's life: "[From] his earliest boyhood the man I killed had listened to stories about the heroic Trung sisters and Tran

Hung Dao's famous rout of the Mongols and Le Loi's final victory against the Chinese at Tot Dong. He had been taught that to defend the land was a man's highest duty and highest privilege. He accepted this," etc. Where do these details come from? How can Tim O'Brien know them? What is going on here?

3. For the remainder of the story, O'Brien portrays himself as profoundly moved by this death: "Later Kiowa said, 'I'm serious. Nothing anybody could do. Come on, Tim, stop staring.'" Describe O'Brien's emotional state in this scene.

4. In "Ambush," O'Brien's daughter, Kathleen, asks if he ever killed a man: "You keep writing these war stories," she said, "so I guess you must've killed somebody." Following this, O'Brien relates two possible scenarios of the death described in "The Man I Killed" to explain, "This is why I keep writing war stories."

Why do you think O'Brien keeps writing war stories?

5. Reread "Good Form" (it's short). In it, O'Brien tells two more versions of "The Man I Killed" story. In the first, Tim simply sees a dead soldier, the one with the star-shaped hole in his cheek, lying at the side of the road, saying, "I did not kill him." Following this, O'Brien admits, "even that story is made up."

In the second version, he explains that he merely saw many faceless, dead men. Where does truth reside in this book? What is the connection between O'Brien's actual experiences and the events in this book? Why is O'Brien using lies to get at "the truth"?

6. In "Ambush," O'Brien tells part of "The Man I Killed" story to his daughter, Kathleen. Consider that O'Brien might not actually have a daughter. Would that change how you feel about the story? If he doesn't have a daughter, what is this "Kathleen" doing in this novel?

I. Style:

1. Why does Azar make fun of the dancing girl later back at camp? More importantly, why do you think Dobbins defends her?
2. For what reason do you think the girl has to dance, if any, amidst all the death and destruction of her village?
3. Why do you think that O'Brien includes this story in the book? How does this event impact the soldiers in the company?

J. Speaking of Courage and Notes:

1. To begin with, consider why this story is called “Speaking of Courage.” Assume the title does NOT hold any irony. In what sense does this story speak of courage?
2. Why does Norman Bowker still feel inadequate with seven medals? Would Norman’s life change if he had won the Silver Star? Explain.
3. What happens to Kiowa? Where does this happen?
4. What is the more difficult problem for Norman – the lack of the Silver Star or the death of Kiowa? Which does he consider more and why?
5. Like other male characters in this novel (for example Tim O’Brien and Lt. Jimmy Cross), Norman Bowker develops an active fantasy life. Why do these men develop these fantasy stories?
6. Why is Norman unable to relate to anyone at home? More importantly, why doesn’t he even try?
7. In “Notes,” O’Brien receives a letter from Norman Bowker, the main character in “Speaking of Courage.” Why does O’Brien include excerpts from this 17-page letter in this book?
8. What happens to Norman Bowker? Why?
9. What does Bowker want Tim to tell a story about? What is his reaction to the first version of the story? How and why does Tim change the original story?
10. What does the narrator say about his transition from Vietnam to civilian life? Do you think this is true? Give evidence to support your answer.
11. Who else feels responsible for Kiowa’s death?
12. Consider for a moment that the letter might be made-up, a work of fiction. Why include it then?

13. In “Notes,” Tim O’Brien says, “You start sometimes with an incident that truly happened, like the night in the shit field, and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain it.” What does this tell you about O’Brien’s understanding of the way fiction relates to real life?

K. In The Field and Field Trip:

1. What does Jimmy Cross blame himself for? Why?
2. What is in Kiowa’s rucksack when they find it?
3. Who do you think the “boy” is?
4. Why does the boy think he is responsible for Kiowa’s death?
5. What, for Tim, is the symbolism of the field where Kiowa dies?
6. When Tim returns to Vietnam 20 years after the war, what does he bring with him and what does he do that surprises his daughter?
7. What is the significance of this action for Tim?

L. Ghost Soldiers and Night Life:

1. Knowing Rat Kiley’s personality, why does he hug O’Brien when he gets lifted off by the chopper?
2. What was the main “ghost” in Vietnam? How does O’Brien become the ghost of this story?
3. How does the relationship between O’Brien and the rest of the soldiers from Alpha Company change after O’Brien’s transfer?
4. Why and how does O’Brien seek revenge on Bobby Jorgensen? How does Tim feel after carrying out that plan? Why?

5. How does the relationship between O'Brien and Jorgensen change after the "trick" O'Brien and Azar play on Jorgensen? Why do you think Azar goes along with O'Brien's trick only to later turn on O'Brien?
6. How does Tim say he has changed during war?
7. How does Rat Kiley get out of active duty in Vietnam?

M. The Lives of the Dead:

1. Reread the first paragraph of "The Lives of the Dead." What tricks does O'Brien use to set readers up to believe this story? How are the details in this collection of stories used in such a way that their truth is hard to deny?
2. Who is Linda and what happens to her?
3. Why do you think the narrator tells us the story about Linda?
4. According to O'Brien, what is the role of stories in Vietnam and after Vietnam? Why does he continue to tell stories about the Vietnam War, about Linda?
5. Reread the final two pages of this book. Consider what the young Tim O'Brien learns about storytelling from his experience with Linda.

How does this knowledge prepare him not only for the war, but also to become a writer? Within the parameters of this story, how would you characterize O'Brien's understanding of the purpose of fiction?

6. Would it change how you read this story, or this novel, if Linda never existed? Why or why not?
7. At the end of the book Tim says, "I realize it is Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story." Explain what you think he means by that.

Dialectical Journal Guidelines

Dialectical Journal

A goal this year is for you to consistently enter into a dialogue with what you read. To develop this skill, you will be keeping a dialectical journal throughout the course. This journal should be kept in a composition notebook that looks just like this one:



You may decorate, cover, or otherwise make it your own, but it should be this size (9 ¾ X 7 ½) and contain at least 100 pages. You will periodically turn the journal in and I do not want varied sizes, shapes and weights to carry.

Set up the page:

Fold the paper so that the line runs from top to bottom (lengthwise). NOTE: You may simply draw a LINE down the middle of the paper. **On the left side of the line**, copy the part of the text you are responding to using proper format:

“Always put quotation marks around what you copy from a book. Then place the author and page number in parenthesis after the quote” (Monahan 34).

Selecting a quotation to respond to:

- A quotation does not need to be dialogue (something a character says).
- Do not let the length of a quotation keep you from selecting it. The important thing is that **the quotation makes you think**.
- When you write the quotation down, be sure you include enough surrounding context so that you can remember its importance.

Remember, since **you** are picking the quote, your commentary in the “making notes” section should be substantial. Jotting only a few comments is not sufficient.

On the right side of the line, write your comments about the quote. These fall into many different categories. Some options are:

- Ask questions you would like to pose to the author. Since the author can’t answer you, you will have to write the answers yourself.
- Make connections between the quotation and whatever it reminds you of from some previous reading, viewing or living experience
- Rewrite the quote from another narrator character’s point of view, or provide what you think another narrator or character’s perspective on that quotation might be
- Identify irony or other literary elements represented in the quotation.

- Counterarguments to the quotation you have chosen
- Personal narrative connecting the quotation to your own experience
- Prediction of how the piece will end – what it will lead you to believe
- Analysis of one passage and its relationship to the meaning of the story as a whole

Grade: This will count as a 120-pt. quiz grade, 15 entries required.

Dialectical Journal Example using *Grendel*

| Insightful quotation and page number | Making Notes (your response to the quotations you selected) |
|--|--|
| <p>#1</p> <p>(opening scene; watching ram mount a tree stump, ready to mate)</p> <p>“Do not think my brains are squeezed shut, like the ram’s, by the roots of horns” (1).</p> | <p>Because Grendel is talking directly to reader, he seems to regard reader as an equal, doesn’t want us to judge him the way we do beasts. He wants reader to know he isn’t stupid, that he’s better than other animals. Does this show that he’s arrogant? It seems to.</p> <p>Also suggests he’s open-minded (brains not “squeezed shut”). I like that.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>#2</p> <p>Grendel is talking about deer, rabbits, bears, MEN and says they</p> <p>“can make, concerning my race, no delicate distinctions. That is their happiness: they see all life without observing it” (3).</p> | <p>Grendel sees himself as a victim of racism, feels judged—seems to imply that he feels judged by his “cover,” not by what’s inside.</p> <p>But also, and this is key--he implies that one can be happy only by NOT observing life. As in, if you see life as it really is, you cannot be happy. So implies that he is UNHAPPY and that he DOES observe life as it is. Wow. That’s depressing.</p> |
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Character List

As you read, note the **KEY DETAILS** about each character: physical appearance, personality traits, **the special objects he carries**, actions, what happens to him/her, etc. Having this info will help you tremendously on the quiz and test.

NOT GRADED, only for your benefit.

1. Azar
2. Mary Anne Bell
3. Elroy Berdahl
4. Norman Bowker
5. Jimmy Cross
6. Eddie Diamond
7. Henry Dobbins
8. Mark Fossie
9. Martha
10. Dave Jensen

11. Bobby Jorgenson
12. Rat Kiley
13. Kiowa
14. Ted Lavender
15. Curt Lemon
16. Tim O'Brien (narrator)
17. Morty Phillips
18. Mitchell Sanders
19. Lee Strunk