



## The Catholic High School of Baltimore Summer Reading Assignment

**Teacher's Name:** Mr. Derosier

**School Year:** 2018-2019

**Grade Level:** 11

**Course Number:** 148

**Course Name:** English Language & Composition

**Academic Level (Honors/AP/CP1/CP2/CPA):** AP

### Reading

*The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien

ISBN Number: 978-0544309760

Many people consider *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien to be a modern masterpiece. American involvement in Vietnam was highly controversial, and returning soldiers often felt that their sacrifices and sufferings were not appreciated. O'Brien's book, though neither a justification nor a condemnation of our nation's actions, shows graphically what it was like to struggle with being involved. It also shows how different such warfare was from any that our armed services had been engaged in before, for the enemy was hard to distinguish from the civilian, and combat did not consist of what one thinks of when hearing the word *battle*. *The Things They Carried* is a fascinating and complex book, one worthy of more than a cursory reading. It is important to reread the stories, taking in not only the physical details but also the deep emotional experience of seeing friends killed, of actually taking the life of another human being, and of being alive after others have died suddenly.

### Assignment

See the ISBN number above. Please purchase this edition of the novel. The summer reading assignment is divided into three parts. Read my instructions for each part carefully. **This entire assignment is to be typed and submitted to me by email at [sderosier@thecatholichighschool.org](mailto:sderosier@thecatholichighschool.org) by the first day of class.** I have no preference pertaining to the spacing, but I do expect you to use a font and text size that will be easy to read. This is not a research paper, so you do not need to format this assignment according to MLA guidelines. Handwritten work and paper copies will not be accepted. Your work must be your own. You are not to collaborate with your classmates on any part of this assignment.



## Part One: American Involvement in Vietnam

Read the following information. Then consult the Internet or other references and, if possible, talk to people involved in the Vietnam War to answer the following questions.

The Vietnam War remains an enigma to the American people. Some still think that it was a big mistake to become involved as a nation in a ground war in Asia. Others feel that we were justified in trying to help that country to resist Communism and set up a democratic government. Young American men were drafted into the army and sent to Vietnam, where thousands of them died. Others, not qualified as conscientious objectors, fled to Canada, many never to return. Research that period in history, and answer the following questions.

- What are some of the reasons that the United States became involved in the conflict in Vietnam?
- Why was this such a difficult situation?
- Why was this a no-win conflict for the United States?
- How many Americans were killed or injured in Vietnam?
- How were Vietnam veterans treated when they returned home?
- What happened to Vietnam after American troops withdrew?

## Part Two: Reading Questions

As you read *The Things They Carried*, answer the following questions to help you remember people, events, and main ideas.

“The Things They Carried”

- What sorts of things did the young men in Vietnam carry?
- What happened to Ted Lavender?
- Why did Kiowa want to keep talking about Ted Lavender’s death?
- Why did Lieutenant Cross burn Martha’s pictures and letters?

“Love”

- How does the time and place setting shift?
- What does Jimmy Cross say about Martha?

“Spin”

- Why is the chapter entitled “Spin”?
- Give an example of comic relief in this section?



#### “On the Rainy River”

- What does the chapter reveal about the narrator?
- What dilemma did the narrator face?
- What decision did the narrator make? Why?

#### “Enemies”

- What caused the fight between Lee Strunk and Dave Jensen?
- How did Dave Jensen resolve the conflict?

#### “Friends”

- What pact did Lee Jensen and Lee Strunk make?
- What happened to Lee Strunk?

#### “How to Tell a True War Story”

- Why did Rat Kiley torture the baby water buffalo?
- What are some characteristics of a true war story?
- What weird experience did the six men on the reconnaissance team have?

#### “The Dentist”

- What does the story show about Curt Lemon?

#### “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”

- Who is the source of this story?
- What did Mark Fossie manage to do?
- What happened to Mary Anne Bell?

#### “Stockings”

- What talisman seemed to protect Henry Dobbins?

#### “Church”

- Why did the two monks relate so well with Dobbins?
- Why did Kiowa object to staying there?

#### “The Man I Killed”

- The narrator actually knows nothing about the dead young Vietnamese man. What biographical sketch does he make up? Why?
- At the end of the chapter, what is Kiowa trying to do?

#### “Ambush”

- How does this chapter relate to the previous one?



#### “Style”

- What strange sight did the men see in the burned village?
- Why did Dobbins become angry with Azar?

#### “Speaking of Courage”

- As you read the chapter, what did you see happening to Norman Bowker? Why?

#### “Notes”

- How does this chapter relate to the previous one?
- What does this chapter imply about Tim O’Brien’s purpose?

#### “In the Field”

- What was wrong with the site where the men dug their foxholes?
- What happened to Kiowa?
- What do the concluding paragraphs describe?

#### “Good Form”

- Did Tim kill a Vietnamese soldier, or did he not?

#### “Field Trip”

- What does this chapter describe?
- Why is Kathleen’s reaction to the Vietnamese battle site so different from her father’s?

#### “The Ghost Soldiers”

- Who was Bobby Jorgenson?
- What happened to Morty Phillips?
- Does the elaborate ruse to scare Jorgenson seem like a true war story? Why or why not?

#### “Night Life”

- What happened to Rat Kiley? Why?

#### “The Lives of the Dead”

- Who was Linda? Why is her story included here?
- What does the narrator seem to believe about stories?



#### Part Four: "The Man He Killed" by Thomas Hardy

Read the following poem by Thomas Hardy carefully, and relate it to *The Things They Carried*. You may have to read the poem several times. Consider, for instance, how the speaker's experiences are like and unlike those of the narrator Tim O'Brien. Your response should be between 75-85 words.

##### The Man He Killed

"Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,  
And staring face to face,  
I shot at him as he at me,  
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because—  
Because he was my foe,  
Just so: my foe of course he was;  
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,  
Off-hand like—just as I—  
Was out of work—had sold his traps—  
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!  
You shoot a fellow down  
You'd treat if met where any bar is,  
Or help to half-a-crown."

—Thomas Hardy



**Assessment:**

In addition to the summer reading assignment, you will take a test on *The Things They Carried* when you return to school in September. The test will consist of matching characters to their descriptions, objective multiple-choice questions, and several short essay questions.