

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

Themes of the Novel

- (1) What is the significance of the "things" the soldiers carried? Do they carry more than just "things"? Why are some of these things "sad" (p. 25)? (p. 1-27, 163-64)
- (2) War is "hell" and it makes men "dirty." (p. 114, 200, 211, 236)
- (3) To talk about a war, you cannot use generalizations, abstractions, or analysis, you can only use gritty details that "make the stomach believe" (p. 78, 85, 89, 177)
- (4) O'Brien said he was a "coward" for going to war (p. 61). Why? He also said that soldiers are often "too frightened to be cowards" (p. 22). What is he saying about cowardice and war?
- (5) How is death talked about and explained? (p. 6, 16, 21, 156, 175, 177) Why is being alive a "burden"? (p. 19, 81)
- (6) Soldiers carry "ghosts." What does this mean? What ghosts does O'Brien carry? (p. 10, 202, 211)
- (7) Is there morality in war? Can stories about war have a clear message? (p. 13-14, 40-41, 44-45, 68, 71, 77, 80, 82, 178, 200)
- (8) O'Brien says that stories can "save" us. How? (p. 275, 244-46) How do stories explain "the burden of being alive" and help people "share the weight of memory"? (14, 15, 19, 27, 32, 34, 36, 38, 71, 158, 179, 224, 230, 244)