



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

The Things They Carried

based on the book by

Tim O'Brien

Written by

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A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TIM O'BRIEN

William Timothy O'Brien was born in Austin, Minnesota, in 1946. When he was in the fourth grade, his family moved to Worthington, Minnesota, the "Turkey Capital of the World" as he describes in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. O'Brien credits his library-board-member father and his elementary-teacher mother with fostering his love for books and his belief in the power of stories to tell truths. His budding literary interests, plus his devotion to baseball--he played shortstop on a little league team coached by his father--led to O'Brien's first writing attempt at around the age of 10: "Timothy of the Little League"!

At 18, O'Brien left Worthington for Macalaster College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he majored in political science. He became active in campus politics and was elected president of the student body during his senior year. As the Vietnam War escalated during O'Brien's college years, he took part in some minor anti-war demonstrations, but those demonstrations were not yet of the intensity of the protests that would soon rock college campuses--including Texas State, where in 1969, a group of students who became known as "the San Marcos 10" were suspended for engaging in peaceful protest against the war in Vietnam.

The summer after O'Brien graduated from Macalaster, he received his draft notice, and in February 1969, he was sent to Vietnam. He served a 13-month tour of duty, during which he earned a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star (for rescuing a wounded comrade under fire), and the Combat Infantry Badge.

After his discharge from the Army, O'Brien studied American military intervention at Harvard, worked as a journalist for The Washington Post, and continued writing about his war experiences, which he had begun to do while still in Vietnam.

Tim O'Brien is the 2005-2006 Roy F. and Joann Cole Mitte Endowed Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University, San Marcos. He is the author of *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, *Going After Cacciato*, winner of the 1979 National Book Award in fiction, and *The Things They Carried*, which was named by the New York Times as one of the ten best books of 1990, received the Chicago Tribune Heartland Award in fiction, and was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 1993 the French edition of *The Things They Carried* received the prestigious Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger. His book *In the Lake of the Woods* was named by Time magazine as the best novel of 1994. The book also received the James Fenimore Cooper Prize from the Society of American Historians and was selected as one of the ten best books of the year by the New York Times. His other books include *Northern Lights*; *The Nuclear Age*; *Tomcat in Love*; and *July, July*.

—Courtesy of Southwest Texas State University

INTRODUCTION

This LitPlan has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, and language skills through exercises and activities related to *The Things They Carried*. It includes 21 lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** introduces students to the extended metaphor of “carrying” to which the novel’s title refers. Following the introductory activity, students are given a transition to explain how the activity relates to the book they are about to read. Following the transition, students are given the materials they will be using during the unit. At the end of the lesson, students begin the pre-reading work for the first reading assignment.

The **reading assignments** are approximately thirty pages each; some are a little shorter while others are a little longer. Students have approximately 15 minutes of pre-reading work to do prior to each reading assignment. This pre-reading work involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing some vocabulary work for 9 to 11 vocabulary words they will encounter in their reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact-based questions; students can find the answers to these questions right in the text. These questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple choice. The best use of these materials is probably to use the short answer version of the questions as study guides for students (since answers will be more complete), and to use the multiple choice version for occasional quizzes.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies as well as to aid in the students' understanding of the book. Prior to each reading assignment, students will complete a two-part worksheet for approximately 9 to 11 vocabulary words in the upcoming reading assignment. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students are then to write down what they think the words mean based on the words' usage. Part II nails down the definitions of the words by giving students dictionary definitions of the words and having students match the words to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have an understanding of the words when they meet them in the text.

After each reading assignment, students will go back and formulate answers for the study guide questions. Discussion of these questions serves as a **review** of the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

After students complete reading the work, there is a **vocabulary review** lesson which pulls together all of the fragmented vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and gives students a review of all of the words they have studied.

A lesson is devoted to the **extra discussion questions/writing assignments**. These questions focus on interpretation, critical analysis, and personal response, employing a variety of thinking skills and adding to the students' understanding of the novel.

There is a **group theme project** in this unit. Students will examine cultural mythologies to explore the connection between blurred truth, storytelling and the deep human need to believe in stories. Students will create a PowerPoint presentation and report their findings to the class.

There are three **writing assignments** in this unit, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or expressing personal opinions. The first assignment gives students an opportunity to explain how they would react in circumstances such as the narrator's: would they evade the draft or heed its call? The second writing assignment asks students to respond to the final lines of the novel and personally answer a question it raises: do stories have the power to save a life? Finally, students will use secondary sources and write using facts gleaned from them, comparing Tim O'Brien's novel with a non-fiction essay about his first trip to Vietnam. Students will point out the primary differences between these two accounts.

There is a **nonfiction reading assignment**. Students must read nonfiction articles, books, etc. to learn more about the Vietnam War.

The **review lesson** pulls together all of the aspects of the unit. The teacher is given four or five choices of activities or games to use which all serve the same basic function of reviewing all of the information presented in the unit.

The **unit test** comes in two formats: multiple choice or short answer. As a convenience, two different tests for each format have been included. There is also an advanced short answer unit test for advanced students.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **Unit Resource Materials** section includes suggestions for an in-class library, crossword and word search puzzles related to the novel, and extra worksheets. There is a list of **bulletin board ideas** which gives the teacher suggestions for bulletin boards to go along with this unit. In addition, there is a list of **extra class activities** the teacher could choose from to enhance the unit or as a substitution for an exercise the teacher might feel is inappropriate for his/her class. **Answer keys** are located directly after the **reproducible student materials** throughout the unit. The **Vocabulary Resource Materials** section includes similar worksheets and games to reinforce the vocabulary words.

The **level** of this unit can be varied depending upon the criteria on which the individual assignments are graded, the teacher's expectations of his/her students in class discussions, and the formats chosen for the study guides, quizzes and test. If teachers have other ideas/activities they wish to use, they can usually easily be inserted prior to the review lesson.

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UNIT OBJECTIVES
The Things They Carried

1. Through reading Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, students will study the theme of storytelling as a way to connect to the past, specifically the experience of the Vietnam War, to the present.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
3. Students will explore the relationship between author, narrator, and character to uncover the role of stories and storytellers in society.
4. Students will be given the opportunity to practice reading aloud and silently to improve their skills in each area.
5. Students will write about their own experiences with the power of storytelling.
6. Students will examine cultural mythologies, legend, or folklore to understand the deep human need to believe in stories.
7. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters in *The Things They Carried* as they relate to the author's theme development.
8. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with the novel.
9. The writing assignments in this unit are geared to several purposes:
 - a. To have students demonstrate their abilities to inform, to persuade, or to express their own personal ideas
Note: Students will demonstrate ability to write effectively to inform by developing and organizing facts to convey information. Students will demonstrate the ability to write effectively to persuade by selecting and organizing relevant information, establishing an argumentative purpose, and by designing an appropriate strategy for an identified audience. Students will demonstrate the ability to write effectively to express personal ideas by selecting a form and its appropriate elements.
 - b. To check the students' reading comprehension
 - c. To make students think about the ideas presented by the novel
 - d. To encourage logical thinking
 - e. To provide an opportunity to practice good grammar and improve students' use of the English language.

READING ASSIGNMENT SHEET
The Things They Carried

Date Assigned	Chapters Assigned	Completion Date
	1-3	
	4	
	5-8	
	9	
	10-14	
	15-16	
	17-19	
	20	
	21-22	

UNIT OUTLINE
The Things They Carried

1 Introduction PVR 1-3	2 Study ?s 1-3 PVR 4	3 Study ?s 4 Writing Assignment #1 PVR 5-8	4 Study ?s 5-8 How to Tell a Story PVR 9	5 Study ?s 9 Film PVR 10-14
6 Study ?s 10-14 Oral Reading Evaluation PVR 15-16	7 Study ?s 15-16 Genre PVR 17-19	8 Study ?s 17-19 Group Activity/ Asking Questions PVR 20	9 Study ?s 20 Setting PVR 21-22	10 Study ?s 21-22 Close Passage Analysis Writing Assignment #2
11 Construct Timeline Discussion	12 Review Characters Improvisation Discussion	13 Nonfiction Reading Library Writing Assignment #3	14 Complete Writing Assignment #3 Writing Conferences	15 Nonfiction Reading Reports
16 Project Assignment	17 Project Completion	18 Extra Discussion ?s	19 Vocabulary Review	20 Test Review
21 Unit Test				

Key: P = Preview Study Questions V = Vocabulary Work R= Read

LESSON ONE

Objectives

1. To introduce the *The Things They Carried* unit
2. To distribute books and other related materials
3. To preview the study questions for chapters 1-3
4. To familiarize students with the vocabulary for chapters 1-3
5. To read chapters 1-3

Activity #1

At the end of the previous class period, ask students to bring their regular English class materials as well as their backpacks or book bags with them to class. Explain that they will need their backpacks or book bags for a class activity. If students forget to bring their backpacks or book bags, send them quickly to their lockers to retrieve them. Give each student a piece of blank lined paper and ask them to create a list of “things they carry.” The key is to keep your directions to a minimum so students must push themselves to take on the challenge with creativity (for example, some students may realize that they carry their memories or their DNA or their faith). Suggest that they look in their backpacks or book bags to get ideas. Allow 10 minutes for this activity, prompting students so they create exhaustive lists. Ask them to number their lists. Make sure they work silently and independently. After 10 minutes, have everyone look over their lists, then have them select 10 items that they would feel comfortable sharing with the group. To report, students can write their 10 items on the board, on large sheets of paper or they may read their lists. Another idea is to go around the room round-robin style, having each student say another item for several rounds.

Transition: Just like we demonstrated in our activity, the items that a group carries reveals a great deal about the people who carry them, including their jobs, priorities, aspirations, fears and so on. We will be reading the first chapter of a book called *The Things They Carried*, which is often anthologized as a short story that focuses on the main characters of the book and, quite literally, what they carry.

Activity #2

Distribute the materials students will use in this unit. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides Students should read the study guide questions for each reading assignment prior to beginning the reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in the section they are about to read. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials for the unit test. **Read through the short answer questions for chapters 1-3.**

Vocabulary Prior to reading a reading assignment, students will do vocabulary work related to the section of the book they are about to read. Following the completion of the reading of the book, there will be a vocabulary review of all the words used in the vocabulary assignments. Students should keep their vocabulary work as study materials for the unit test. **Do the first vocabulary worksheet together orally so students know how to do it in the future.**

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1
The Things They Carried

PROMPT

In “On the Rainy River,” the narrator reveals his attempt to evade the draft. He is faced with the opportunity to escape to Canada without alerting authorities. He, literally, makes it within feet of the Canadian border, yet he returns home and eventually reports for service.

Your assignment is to write an essay that explains what you would do if you were faced with the identical situation. Your essay should show an in-depth understanding of the narrator’s conflict. Additionally, your essay should include quotes from the chapter, which you will use to support or contrast with your own ideas and opinions.

PREWRITING

The first task is to make sure you understand the narrator’s motive as he chooses to report for military duty. You should skim the chapter and make note of any passages with which you agree or disagree. Lastly, jot down a bulleted list of reasons why you personally would want to serve or flee.

DRAFTING

Your first paragraph should explain your perception of the narrator’s conflict and an understanding of the motives that brought about his action. This paragraph should also explain your personal opinion of the situation and clearly indicate if you would fight or flee.

Your body paragraphs should explain different criteria for your decision and compare your thoughts on these criteria with the narrator’s, incorporating quotes and explaining how you agree or disagree with them. You should explore one criteria per paragraph.

In your concluding paragraph you should summarize the main criteria that you are basing your criteria upon and restate your opinion.

PROMPT

When you finish the rough draft of your paper, ask a student who sits near you to read it. After reading your rough draft, he/she should tell you what he/she liked best about your work, which parts were difficult to understand, and ways in which your work could be improved. Reread your paper considering your critic's comments, and make the corrections you think are necessary.

PROOFREADING

Do a final proofreading of your paper double-checking your grammar, spelling, organization, and the clarity of your ideas.