

An analysis of tim o'brien's the things they carried essay



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How does shame fit into O'Brien's Portrayal of the war experience? The war experience can carry a lot of shame for a soldier. Tim O'Brien portrays it very well in his book "The Things They Carried." There are many ways shame can show itself during war although you wouldn't think so since they are serving our country. It drives them to do things that they wish they had not.

O'Brien really brings all of the possible shameful acts to the reader's attention. Shame is the reason that Tim O'Brien decided to go to Vietnam. Many of the characters feel shame as a primary motivator, too. Not only does it lead them to war, but it keeps them there. It is the one thing that keeps them from shooting themselves in the foot so that they would be discharged from the army or some similar such act. But some characters, like Curt Lemon, think that shame impels them to heroism, not stupidity.

One of the more recognizable shameful acts included Lt. Cross. Cross was the leader of his troops though he did not act like it sometimes. He neglected to step up and lead his men in many situations when they needed him the most. The cause of his neglect came from his obsession with a girl back home. Her name is Martha and she sends him several letters during his time in Vietnam. However Martha is not obsessed with Cross like he is with her. The letters she sends him are more friendly than romantic, but he thinks he is in love with her.

It takes the death of his comrade Lavender for him to realize his mistake. He has focused on Martha so much that he failed to lead his troops. Lavender's death triggers an epiphany and makes him realize he must give all of his focus to his men.

After all is said and done he will always be ashamed for thinking about Martha so much. Also he will always feel slightly responsible for Lavender's death. Another example of shame is shown by all of the soldiers.

The group of men all participated in burning down an entire village. The reason for such an act was the death of Ted Lavender. Blinded by rage the men demolish a village, which many natives lived in. They took all their anger out on many innocent people. Since they were all mad they neglected to see the wrong in their acts and after the event they were filled with shame. They all knew that there was no excuse for the thing they have done.

It is hard to move on with all that shame and the troops felt it. There was an event that could be considered as shameful. But it also could be considered as reasonable.

When the troops were put under heavy fire they didn't know how to react. They lost their soldier like composure and dropped to their knees cowering in fear like a little kid. They bursted into tears as if they were babies who dropped their ice cream.

Although it might be something they find shameful others may see it as understandable. The war can take a serious emotional effect on a soldier. They were ashamed at the fact that they were too scared to fire back at the opposing forces. The next example is more of an act to hide their shame. All of the men carry good luck charms of personal items. This was an effort to keep a connection with their real life back home. This shows that superstition plays a big role in how the men feel about being on the battlefield. In fact, it is a strong influence in the story.

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The items of their loved ones are used as a way to shield the men from harm, instead of admitting they are afraid, they cling to objects for strength. If they admit to being afraid it would definitely be shameful. Also Henry Dobbins has a way of hiding his shame. Henry is the biggest man in the group. He carries the M-60 machine gun. It weighed twenty-three pounds unloaded. Henry always kept it loaded because he was scared and always wanted to feel some sort of protection. He uses his machine gun as a way to hide his fear and ultimately his shame.

He also carries his girlfriend's pantyhose around his neck as a comforter. Although it may be comfortable it is obviously a sign of him trying to stay connected with his girlfriend and his life back home. But once again he uses his big gun as a way to hide his shame. As you can see shame played a huge role in this book. And if it wasn't for Tim O'Brien's great description of the shameful events one may not have been able to catch each of them. It really helps portray the whole war experience the way O'Brien wanted.

It wasn't just one person who suffered from shame, but it was all of the men in the group. Not all experienced it the same way, but they all had their own way. It ranged anywhere from neglect of men and their death to doing something embarrassing or something they weren't proud of.