

# The vietnam war and the things they carried

[War](#), [Vietnam War](#)



“The Things They Carried” is a story that presents various accounts of painful experiences and traumatic events of the soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War. The author explores the great use of literary devices in explaining the occurrence of every event. In a well-developed piece that uses imagery, metaphors, reality, and fiction, O’Brien represents the emotional baggage that the soldiers had to carry through the war. The things that the soldiers carried indicated their loss of purity, despair as they lost the way and their narrowed chances of survival.

O’Brien connects different literary devices. The narrative has the themes of conflict, escape, guilt, and acceptance. The story is narrated in the third person, and the reader becomes aware of the significance of the title. First, O’Brien explains the theme of escape from guilt by the letters and pictures Martha sent to Lieutenant Cross. Cross would spend the whole night looking at the pictures and reading the letters while imagining that he was with her to escape the thought of war. Cross is trying to escape from the reality of war that he was stuck with and he feels guilty about it.

Similarly, O’Brien mentions several other soldiers who try to escape the reality in a similar way. Rat Kiley uses tranquilizers to escape the same reality, while Dobbin wears a pair of his girlfriend’s stockings around his neck. Seemingly, every character in the story has their unique way of running away from reality. The items used are also symbolically significant as they emphasize on the theme of escape.

The story also explores the theme of love as O’Brien takes us through his thoughts on the love story between Martha and Cross. Lieutenant Cross

cannot stop thinking about Martha even at the camp. The two met in college, and ever since, no other girl has given him the same feeling of love that he felt for Martha. Similarly, the fact that Martha did not get married even after she got separated from cross indicates that she loved him. This is a case of mutual love that just would not work out. Whenever he looked at the photographs, he thought of new things he should've done. (O'Brien, P. 2). This line portrays an element of guilt and regret as lieutenant things of all the things he should have done for the person that he loved.

Lieutenant cross carries with him the hope that he will one day reunite with the love of his life and start a family. He carries her picture everywhere he goes so every time he looks at it, he thinks of everything he should have done.

The title of the story is symbolical as it reflects many things that the soldiers went through during the war. The title has a metaphoric aspect of fear and guilt that most of the soldiers carried in their hearts. The title symbolizes a burden whose impacts last in history. The physical weapons and the emotional ? weapons' are also symbolic as they portray the nature of war and sets the mood of the narrative. From the weapons, we can immediately tell that the story is about war. The symbols provide a graphic description of the realities of war (O'Brien, p. 21). The symbols enable the reader to see the story from the author's perspective. As the title suggests, the story portrays how the things the soldiers carried were not as heavy as their feelings of love, guilt, loss, fear , and the awful memories of the war as portrayed in the line, They all carried emotional baggage of men who might

die. Grief, terror, love, longing- these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific (O'Brien, p. 23).

The author also utilizes the aspect of thought. The story brings forth the memories of war that took place over two decades ago while portraying the physical, emotional, as well as the economic damages that the war brought to the society.

These damages are reflected in the lives of the soldiers and their families (O'Brien, p. 23). The depressive nature of war is portrayed by the characters who had to take tranquilizers to calm their nerves. From a close analysis, O'Brien uses the characters as metaphoric artifacts to represent people in the society. These soldiers blame themselves for the deaths of their fellow soldiers. Just like the soldiers, people always carry the memory, love, and grief for those who die in the war trying to protect us.

The theme of war represents the state of conflicts and inhumanity in society. The society is always at a state of conflict as people commit all sorts of evil in the name of war. O'Brien does not directly criticize the aspect of the war in the society through the series of events in the story and leaves the reader to reflect on what is wrong or right. The aspect of conflict appears in the soldier's decision to go to war. Many of them were afraid to go to war but felt the need to so they carried with them the pressure and acted like all is well.

The soldiers undergo a personal conflict as the battle and thought between what is right and what should be done.

The metaphor, all you can do is whimper and wait (O'Brien, p. 211) provides a clear picture of the soldier's attitude towards the war. They had no choice

but to sit there and wait for their fate because things were already getting out of hand. The phrase also gives an idea of how the soldiers felt towards each other. Although they were not very close, they had an idea of how everyone felt because they were going through a similar moment at the same time. The phrase shows imagery and greater details of how Bobby and Azar felt towards each other. O'Brien also developed strong relationships that almost felt as if the characters were all one person.

O'Brien applies a great use of repetition to develop the story. We see many instances of the characters reappearing in the story. This form of repetition forms an everlasting instinct for the reader to keep up with each character without losing track all through the story.

Although the death of Lavender is mentioned at the beginning of the narrative, the narrator keeps taking us back to this event to give the reader more details about the event and create a new perspective every time. Repetition enables the reader to reflect back and keep memories of the soldiers. For instance, repetition is seen when Lieutenant Cross constantly thinks about Martha, his college girlfriend from way back. The repetition is meant to remind the reader of the love that cross had for Martha. Through this, O'Brien successfully achieves character development and allows the reader to follow all the characters throughout the story.

The story truly expresses the real meaning of contemporary literature.

O'Brien successfully brings all his ideas and experiences and place them in the story to create a meaningful piece of contemporary literature. He puts great effort to make the story look as real as possible using his own

experiences. He achieves realism by mixing reality and fiction. Using his experiences in the Vietnam War, he gives pictures of the harsh truths about war and the real emotions that human beings really carry in their hearts. He also expresses the dilemma that people have to deal with in making rash decisions as well as the pain and guilt that survivors of war have to deal with.

Characters in the narrative also use metafiction to get the real truth about the main events of the Vietnam War. O'Brien describes the difference between happening truth and narrative truth in the chapter Good Form (O'Brien, p. 179)

O'Brien applies a non-chronological sequence in narrating the story. His story is based on random observation of the characters. The story revolves around the lives of the characters which primarily develops the story. He uses a simple language to understand the message he is putting across easily. He also uses slang, obscene dark humor, and military lingo to give the narrative an aesthetic value. Most of the conversations in the story are brief and punctuated with dashes instead of quotation marks to incorporate the spoken words into narrative.