

Vietnam war in the book "the things they carried" by tim o'brien essay

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



The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien's is a fictional story that surpasses the field of Vietnam War fiction. Essentially, it surpasses the fiction in general even though the author categorizes it as a work of fiction. The story, narrated in first-person narrator covers the events before and after the war.

The story exposes the soldiers' dilemma, fears, and feelings during and after the war. The author explores the historical, social and economic setting of the time, which is evident in the contemporary world (O'Brien 1).

The soldiers are depicted as young men who are unprepared for the war. This is evident by the intangible emotional fear they carry along with memories of their loved ones. Tim O'Brien's captures the historical negative effects of Vietnam War on US economy.

The soldiers carried some food supplies, pictures of their girlfriends, fear, sadness and confusion. This in essence portrayed their social status, a characteristic exhibited by a present day soldier when going to war.

The Irony of being at war is that Peace and conflict are both inevitable; it is the way we handle either of the two that determines our opinion of life in general both in the present and future, that is clearly depicted in the book where O'Brien is the Protagonist re-living his experience at war through the pages of his book as the fictional character.

Age, we see that this is an important qualification required when recruiting troops to join the army in fighting any war. Among other things, lack of maturity was largely the cause of death as young men under nineteen, were

not equipped with the emotional stability required to deal with the Ugliness of war.

When drafted, one is not left with much choice and the decision made is unfortunately more often than no based on fear other than ethics. With the alternative of going to jail many of the young men reluctantly motivated only by the embarrassment of shame.

Among the striking things possessed by the soldiers were weapons, protective gears for survival purposes. Personal items included a bible, foot powder, comic books, marijuana and a hatchet. O'Brien asserts that dignity could never be put down and was perhaps the hardest emotion to carry but could not be surrendered.

O'Brien observes that fear and panic in the midst of the noise of battle was a common phenomenon. Ironically, some soldiers were at the brink of crying, wishing that they had not come (O'Brien 21). The narrator brings forward the constant stream of distressing memories of the war, attempts of realism and insights. Fear among the soldiers was covered up with unusual stunts and tough speeches.

The human nature of the soldiers is clearly depicted by the things they carried. O'Brien lists the items that were carried by the soldiers, and this way, he individualizes and humanizes them. The intangible items carried by the soldiers were even more symbolic.

O'Brien observes that the items were heavier than their tangible backpacks. Although the soldiers appear to have no idea of what they were fighting, their country, God and the weight of duty characterized their intangible items. He writes, " It was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march" (O'Brien 15).

Another irony depicted by the story is the soldiers' real motivation; fear of being referred as cowards. Every soldier is said to have death as his ultimate fear, but death was better than humiliation.

In the history books, the Vietnam War is best described as America's longest war dated back to President Harry Truman who committed fifteen million dollars aid to the French forces in Indochina in 1950 to the fall of Saigon in 1975. In the years the funding of wars has been on the increasing prompting more and more soldiers dehumanize each other to cope with the deaths of their comrades.

The pain of losing their comrades affected the soldiers during and after the war. According to the narrator, " soldiers used a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness" (O'Brien 20). He observes that soldiers formed intimate relationship, just like any other colleagues in an organization.

Nevertheless, soldiers used language to trivialize their bonds when death occurred to their comrades. In place of the word die or dead, they used words like greased, zapped, offend, lit up, to describe the deaths of their

friends thus proving the fact that though death is inevitable, none of us want to live in the reality of it.

The Things They Carried is very relevant to Peace and Conflict studies. The book clearly points out the unwillingness and unpreparedness of the soldiers when going to war.

We see an inner conflict as depicted by O'Brien and a continuous struggle to release the pain and anguish that has builds up as a result of experiences from the war affecting the family around him trying to find meaning and redemption in his war stories. The characters in the story acts to speak loudly against the option of going to war, a war like the Vietnam War.

O'Brien, Tim. The Things They Carried. New York, NY: Broadway Publishers, 1998. Print.