

The things they carried essay

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The Things They Carried Essay Number Three Tim O'Brien's novel, *The Things They Carried*, is a novel composed of war stories from the Vietnam War. O'Brien tells the stories of not only himself, but stories from the men with whom he fought alongside. The main idea of the book is what these men carried, which was not only tangible objects, but emotions as well. Digging deeper into this meaning, many of the stories were changed from their true and factual selves to half true and half fictitious stories based on that person's emotions at that time. Many writers, such as Tim O'Brien, find more truth in fiction than on the actual occurring event.

In Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* there is a blurred line between fact and fiction and the real Tim O'Brien and Tim's character. Tim's character represents his truth from his emotional views and the narrator Tim tells what really happened. Tim O'Brien's character in *The Things They Carried* looked in the faces of the dead, but in reality he did not have the strength to look into the faces of the deceased. He could call this his own truth because his emotions are what he was writing down. All he did was take the way that he felt and added details and faces to events that actually occurred.

For most people this is their own truth. Everybody has their own truth because memories are driven by emotion and the emotions can sometimes temporarily or even permanently block out what really happened and a story from factual events is created. Throughout the majority of the novel Tim uses character Tim over narrator Tim, but he does occasionally distinguish fact from emotions. During the instance when O'Brien's daughter asks him if he has ever killed a man O'Brien hesitates in a truthful answer. It seems as

though he is greatly conflicted because he feels as if he has killed a man, but he never actually killed a man.

It is as if by him being a part of the war and not helping the dying men it is a fault of his that he could not help to save them by stopping it. His emotions told him he was a murderer who looked in the face of his victim, who was a young boy he created a life story for; when in reality that boy was never his kill. To the reader it seems that he is contradicting himself, but in actuality he is differentiating between himself and his emotional character. In the chapter, "How to Write a True War Story," O'Brien tells the reader about the blurred line between fact and fiction.

He tells us what a true war story is and what it is not. According to O'Brien a true war story is never moral, instructing, or uplifting. He also tells us that in a true war story, "it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen." He also tells us that it is "a hard an exact truth as it seemed." This is where the lines become blurred. As it seems from the way O'Brien speaks, men do not have the courage to witness entire incidences such as Curt Lemon's death. He writes that they watch pieces of it, close their eyes, and open them some more. Everything they remember seems true to them based on the facts.

Readers may never truly know what happened, but they do know what that person was feeling based on the way the story was told. There is no clear line between fact and story for author Tim O'Brien. To him the lines blur together from time apart from the event and remembering the emotions felt. His novel *The Things They Carried* represents this idea through its use of storytelling. All of his short stories pieced together to create the novel each

represent a different form of truth for different men along with Tim. O'Brien was successful in using this blurred line between fact and story for his war stories.