

# Tim o'brien's how to tell a true war story: a review essay



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Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" is a unique way of narrating war stories. The author who also acted as the narrator will tell bits of stories of soldier's experiences and then ponders on the art of telling stories of "war". This story is classified as fiction but as you read it, one can say that the events may have actually happened considering Tim O'Brien's background as a Vietnam War veteran before he became a writer. However, the beginning sentence "This is true" may confuse the readers of what truth the narrator wants to convey (O'Brien, 1990).

Hence, this is a narration of contradictions: of fiction and reality, of truth and imagination, of clarity and ambiguousness, of what is humane and inhumane. In O'Brien's first story about his friend Rat Kiley writing a letter to his friend's sister who never wrote back to him, the author is telling the readers about the immorality of a true war story. Unlike other stories, the author says you can never hear virtues or values for readers to emulate and learn because a true war story adheres to obscenity and evil. These are expressed in these scenes of the story: Rat Kiley calling his friend's sister a "cooze" and Rat shooting a baby buffalo while the whole platoon is watching. This could be understood that the nature of war really gets through the soldiers' senses from the way they talk, think, and act (O'Brien, 1990). This story is an expression of Tim O'Brien and other soldiers' bitter experiences of the Vietnam War while weaving the truth, memory and fiction creatively and uniquely. This piece of art with combined reality and fiction could also be one of the author's ways of recuperating from the memories, complexities and inhumane nature of the war.

This story gives the readers a peep through some of the details of what happened to the Vietnam War soldiers. Reading the words and codes such M-16, Juicy Fruit, F-4s, 105 round, and C rations, one can also easily associate this story to some realities of the war the author had experienced (O'brien, 1990). This could also bring back the readers' minds what happened now to the veterans of the Vietnam War. A study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) about them stated that one third of them have experienced this disorder after they returned home. Public awareness on PTSD even increased after the Vietnam War.

This disorder is a delayed reaction to an abnormal, traumatic life experience due to exposure to combat (Niles, 1991). Some of the symptoms of PTSD " include a re-experiencing of the traumatic event through disturbing thoughts and recollections, having a flashback of the events, avoidance of anything that can be associated with the event, numbing or generalized diminished responsiveness to the external world, sleep disturbances, and increased hyper-vigilance, startled responses and emotional outbursts. " (Niles, 1991).

Hence, one can say that this story " How to tell a True War Story" and other " war stories" of Tim O'Brien could also be in one way or another can trigger some of the bad memories in the minds of the victims and their families on the Vietnam War. We don't ask for it but war stories can still leave " a bit of bang" in the minds of veterans' and their families who can associate themselves in this type of story. However, this could still be a saving grace for some veterans who lost their confidence and self-esteem after returning from the war. Since some of the Vietnam veterans were shunned by people in their communities and labeled them as " warmongers" and " baby killers. <https://assignbuster.com/tim-obriens-how-to-tell-a-true-war-story-a-review-essay/>

" These reactions denied them the support that they needed to adjust from military life to civilian life. And often, guilt grew as they reflect of what had happened and could not find the meaning of their involvement in the war (Paulson, 1997). This work of Tim O'Brien implies to readers that the American soldiers who fought during the Vietnam War did not dreamed of the life that they had, did not ceased to become human because after every battle as Tim O'Brien (1990) narrates...You feel an intense, out-of-the-skin awareness of your living self - your truest self the human being you want to be...In the midst of evil you want to be a good man .