

Discuss the
contrasting literary
styles used in James
Baldwin's *Sonny's
Blues* and...



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Literary Analysis Paper Tim O' Brien is very well known for having won both the Pulitzer and the National Book Critics Circle Award for his modus operandi - *The Things They Carried*, a book of short stories based on the lives of American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War, and the kind of struggles, hardships as well as joyous emotions they went through in their lives. James Baldwin on the other hand, is famous for *Sonny's Blues*, a short story about an adolescent introvert who goes through various stages in his life including some struggles and undergoing trauma in the form of heroin addiction. This paper is a reflection of the comparison of literary analysis and in depth meanings of the characters and the circumstances in both the books. Literary Analysis Paper The stories of James Baldwin and Tim O'Brien have a common element amongst them, mentioned explicitly; the attribute of undergoing struggle. In O'Brien's book, struggle and hardships can be seen through the eyes of American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War, whereas in Baldwin's tale, Sonny is seen fighting life and addictions in order to patch his relationships with other people around him as well as himself. ' *The Things They Carried*' is about experiences that the soldiers, led by Tim O'Brien went through, which included tangible as well as intangible important elements. These included emotions and feelings like fear, dread and guilt, as well as the kind of machines and guns which formed an inherent part of their routine lives in the War. ' *Sonny's Blues*' is about a young heroin addict, set in a post World War era, depicting a great amount of political and economical tension raging in America at the time, with respect to culture and the old arts. The book is a story full of symbolism; in this particular tale, O'Brien has marked a very vivid description of all the objects that the various soldiers carry with them. Incidentally, all these objects help the reader to <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-contrasting-literary-styles-used-in-james-baldwins-sonnys-blues-and-tim-obriens-the-things-they/>

understand the kind of people the soldiers are and the kind of relationship they share with others around them. He has written about Lavender's obsession with tranquilizers and marijuana, Dobbins' need to carry his girlfriend's pantyhose around his neck as well as his extra rations, and Kiowa carrying a copy of the New Testament at all times. All this imagery helps to provide a stark understanding to the reader as per the needs and priorities of the soldiers. O'Brien has also described the kind of burden each man carries on his shoulders in the form of memories from their personal lives, for example, the lieutenant's obsession with Martha back home leaves him feeling very disgruntled and regretful. These thoughts eventually leave him questioning and wondering about Martha's virginity and this eventually leads to distractions and death. He also carried maps and compasses, giving a picture of the true leader that he was, always looking out for his soldiers. Physical objects like machine guns, M-16 rifles, grenade launchers and tents help to depict the harsh reality they were surviving in. Thus, with the use of these physical objects that the soldiers require during their stay in the War, the author has tried to explain the kind of dilemma they were being made to choose between - fantasy and reality. (SparkNotes 2002) In comparison, Sonny's Blues consists of a great influence of music in the boy's life, which gives him an ambition or desire to be something in life. The traditional Jazz played throughout the course of the book is a symbol of the kind of dreams Sonny had. Famous jazz musicians were his idols and the boy viewed his life as a platform to develop his talent and give back to society in the form of music, flowing through his veins, and out to the world. The music symbolized the kind of freedom that he wanted to have, and felt that it was his only escape route into a reality worth living. Sonny felt that even his heroin

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addiction would be forgiven by God if he played music through and with all his heart, for the rest of the world. It was his way of repenting and redemption. Another reason for the contemporary styles of culture and art portrayed in the book is the backdrop or historical context. The era the book was set in was a post World War world where people were struggling to get their voices of freedom heard; there were a number of soldiers returning from War thrust into urban civilisation, and thus, in this world, Sonny's work was like a cry towards the rapid development and removal of street art and culture into modernisation. (SparkNotes 2007) References SparkNotes Editors (2007). Sparknote on Sonny's Blues. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from <http://www.sparknotes.com/short-stories/sonnys-blues/context.html> SparkNotes Editors (2002). Sparknote on The Things They Carried. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/thingscarried/section1.rhtml>