

The realistic setting in the o'brien story "the things they carried" essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The Things They Carried' is one of the short stories in the book " Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing." The story was written by Tim O'Brien who, according to his military life experiences between 1968 and 1970 served as an infantry fighter in Vietnam. Though the characters of this story are fictional, O'Brien obviously created a realistic setting in the story based on his personal experiences in combat.

By doing so, he was able to depict the harsh realities and emotional problems that soldiers go through in war environments. This analysis became evident in the story as depicted by the actions of the principal character, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross. Lieutenant Cross carried a heavy burden within himself after failing to concentrate in the war. Consequently, he lost his sense of reality by constantly daydreaming about a girl known as Martha.

The beginning of the short story is a simple one explaining the things soldiers carried as they went to war. O'Brien found it difficult to discuss most of the topics in the story hence he employed a distant way of telling the story of the Vietnam War. His intention was to convey the message that the war did not affect him much. However, the structure and the feelings created by the events starting from noble events to distressing ones are important in the story.

They form the basis of the discussion of emotional experiences that affected the soldiers in combat. In the end, it was clear that the things that soldiers carried were not at all ' things.' The soldiers had to deal with the emotional feelings of men who were exposed to the risk of death. Things like terror, love and fear were not tangible but the weight they had on the soldiers was

tangible. The author says that the soldiers carried with them shameful memories and a feeling of cowardice (O'Brien 21).

The presentation of such passages causes the reader to share in the grief of the soldiers. The author gives details that compel the reader to look at the soldiers as fellow human beings and people who go through the experiences of normal human beings. Just like other human beings, the soldiers had their troubles and emotions.

Fear, cowardice and shame were some of the burdens they carried while at war. These were burdens that troubled them contributing towards their character change. O'Brien uses characters like Mary Anne Bell and Mark Fossie to show how the soldiers were changed from innocent people into savages.

As the author gives an explanation of the things soldiers carried, he presents the major themes of imagination and memory in the story. O'Brien succeeds in showing how these two themes can facilitate mental escape. For instance, Lieutenant Cross always thought of Martha even as he performed his normal duties during the war. He did not have memories of her but only imagined of their romantic trips together.

These imaginations of Lieutenant Cross are described by the author as full of pretence. The importance of the deeds of Lieutenant Cross is shown when O'Brien gives information about the photograph of Martha and letters from her that were carried by Lt Cross. These symbolized the love Cross had for Martha.

O'Brien deviates from using literary techniques where he describes the physical things of the soldiers and presents the most important characters in the story. He provides important details of the things that were carried by the soldiers. The explanation of the things carried by the soldiers helps the reader to look at them in a more realistic manner.

The author aims at helping the reader connect with the feelings of the soldiers and take the situation as if it was real. Details such as the weight of things like radios, grenades and weapons seem trivial but assist the readers in getting a real picture of the weight of the war (O'Brien 399).

O'Brien uses the death of Lavender to present the situation Lieutenant Cross found himself in since his role in the war conflicted with his conscience and the imaginations that brought peace to him. Lieutenant Cross burnt the letters from Martha and accepted that he was responsible for the death of Lavender.

This conflict in his line of thought informs the reader that one should be careful to differentiate fantasy from truth. Although he burned what seemed to be a constant reminder of Martha, his memory of her did not disappear. In addition, he carried a burden of guiltiness and pain for what he did.

Lieutenant Cross is used by the author to explain the concept of mental escapism. Mental escapism is defined as the act of focusing on unimportant things in order to avoid unpleasant conditions. Lieutenant Cross was supposed to focus on the war but instead he spent all his time thinking about Martha.

After the death of Kiowa, he was also supposed to look for his body but instead he concentrated on thinking about the letter he had to write to Kiowa's father. He managed to concentrate on issues that were not related to the war yet he was compelled to carry a heavy burden because of that. The short story was an important contribution towards the Literature of war in Vietnam with O'Brien being credited for his ability in memorializing war experiences.

O'Brien, Tim. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. New York: Longman, 2010. Print.