

Characterization in the dentist

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Characterization in " The Dentist" from The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien Name Course January 19, 2012 Instructor Characterization in " The Dentist" from The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien In " The Dentist" from The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien begins by telling a story of a character, Curt Lemon, whom O'Brien was not particularly fond of and whose death was not easy to mourn. O'Brien tells a story of Curt Lemon as to avoid sentimentalism. The setting takes place along the South China Sea, in which the men of the platoon are working in an area of operations called the Rocket Pocket.

This story of Curt Lemon begins by telling of a visit by an Army dentist who was flown in to examine the men's teeth and perform minor repairs. O'Brien describes Lemon as tense in this moment, at which point Lemon explains to the men of the platoon that his experiences with dentists in the past have not been pleasant and now he refuses to let anyone mess with his teeth. When he is called in to get his teeth checked, he faints. But later he returns and tells the dentist that he has a severe toothache and insists that it be pulled immediately. Although the dentist finds no problems with Curt Lemon's tooth, he obliges.

It is ironic that Curt Lemon is killed at the Rocket Pocket by a grenade that he was playing catch with, just after he is reassured of his bravery by facing his fear and having his tooth pulled. It is ironic because Lemon is severely afraid of something as typically harmless as a checkup by a dentist, yet completely disregards the potential harm of playing catch with a deadly weapon. The tone is that of an introspective story of memory, as shown through this story of his remembrance of Curt Lemon and the Army dentist

as well as the way in which he speaks of Lemon's experiences with dentists in his past.

I believe O'Brien chooses this particular story of Curt and the dentist because it is one of general fondness, which is in line with the tone of the story. This story is somewhat humorous and ironic and these are the types of sentimentalisms that typically remain in one's introspective memory for a lifetime. The general themes in this story appear to portray the weight of one's emotional as well as physical burdens. There also seems to be a theme of motivation through a fear of shame, as shown by Curt's fear of the dentist, which he is ashamed of, which then motivates him to prove his bravery. The "Dentist" appears to illustrate physical suffering as an easier burden than that of emotional or mental suffering. The greatest enemy of these soldiers was that which was unknown. Curt Lemon gets his tooth pulled in an attempt to appear brave to his platoon and perhaps to be acquainted with the feeling of suffering. Through the act of experiencing this pain and becoming acquainted with this suffering, Curt Lemon's mind is eased of the anticipation and fear of the unknown suffering he might endure in war. This appears to be an insignificant triumph, but in reality is necessary amid the chaos of war.