

Fear in the things they carried

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Tim O'Brien's decision to go to Vietnam was out of the fear from disappointing his family and community. How does shame affect and play a role in the life of the soldiers in *The Things They Carried*? *The Things They Carried* is a book set in Massachusetts but the core of the book is based in Vietnam. A group of soldiers go to war and Tim O'Brien decides to document the true effects of war but beneath his words, there were a lot of factors and double meaning to them.

The motif "Shame" played a huge part in every character in this book as it was a trait they all shared in common. Shame in this context is not necessarily a bad thing as with the power of hindsight, we found it to have been a motivating factor for them during the war in more ways than one. They could decide to inflict injury on themselves as a way to get discharged from their military service but the fear of shame further guided them to be heroes for their country. The interesting thing about this book is that shame was a common factor shared by all men.

Their fear of shame and weakness propelled them to act braver than they were. It is not a secret knowing that the soldiers were a little bit afraid of the war but they all did a good job in masking their shame and fears. In *The Things They Carried*, "They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide, and in many respects this was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down, it required perfect balance and perfect posture" (77).

In analyzing this quote, their instinct to run or hide had to be restrained due to fear of being made fun of by colleagues and being called a coward. The chapter "On the Rainy River" summarizes Tim's moral fight against being
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drafted into an unjust war. The Vietnam War was one he strongly opposed and his decision to fight is not down to his bravery or him being a patriot, but that of the 'fear of shame' and being tagged a coward. Therefore he succumbed to the pressure. "I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward.

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"I went to the war" (79). This statement is an example of how shame had him motivated. Him calling himself a coward was the fear of 'shame' overpowering his principles. He initially thought of running off to Canada after being drafted but was scared that if he did not acknowledge the draft, he would be ridiculed/punished and that would be him disappointing his community and family. In order to avoid this shame facing him, he decided to be brave and go to war and fight for his country. He ended up going and survived the ains of the war due to shame being his motivating factor in his decision. Additionally, looking at Curt Lemons in "The Dentist", shame was an igniting force leading to some of the characters bravery and heroism. Curt Lemon suffered an embarrassing fate in this chapter where he fainted before being observed by the visiting dentist. In fear of social acceptance and how the soldiers in the platoon would look at him, he decided to face his fears and shame by having his tooth removed although there was nothing wrong with it.

One can attribute the survival of some of the soldiers to shame as it gave them the needed extra incentive to survive. With his renewed ego, this would make him feel stronger and ready for the worst (increasing his bravery while mitigating his shame). Shame, no matter how negative the definition <https://assignbuster.com/fear-in-the-things-they-carried/>

seems to be, the characters in *The Things They Carried* made the most out of it by making it an unorthodox form of motivation for going to war and trying to survive it. Safe to say O'Brien's characters (soldiers) value pride more than their life. Olumide Shodipo