

The things they carried

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Body Paragraph #1: O'Brien uses contrasting images while describing the death of Curt Lemon. He first depicts Lemon's death in a pleasant way: "[W]hen he died it was almost beautiful the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up... into a tree full of... white blossoms" (O'Brien 67). In a way, Lemon is being reborn because of the trees and white blossoms symbolize spring and rebirth. It's almost like O'Brien is imagining him going to a better place. On the contrary, O'Brien then states, "The parts were just hanging there... pieces of skin and something wet and yellow that must've been the intestines. The gore was horrible and stays with me" (79). This experience "hangs around" in O'Brien's mind and the gore of it also adds to the part of the war that O'Brien just can't let go of.

Body Paragraph #2: Mary Anne Bell goes through a huge change when Mark Fossie flies her in to Vietnam. When she first arrives, she is portrayed as "an attractive girl... she had terrific legs, a bubbly personality and a happy smile" (O'Brien 90). Rat Kiley describes her legs and appearance so vividly to show desire of the men during the war. They all long something from home, such as love, and Mary Anne Bell gives them that. After a few weeks, Rat Kiley illustrates the full change in Mary Anne Bell: "There was no emotion behind her stare, no sense of person behind it... At the girl's throat was a necklace of human tongues" (O'Brien 105). Mary Anne Bell is just a representation of how the war can change a normal person into one who wears human tongues. Her character represents vulnerability because of how little her and the soldiers know about war, and how drastically it can change them.

Body Paragraph #3: While examining a scene, the soldiers come across a girl who is dancing while her whole village is burned down. They find this odd, as

her family is dead in the house. When O'Brien recalls the image of her dancing, he says she "went up on her toes and made a slow turn and danced through the smoke. Her face had a dreamy look, quiet and composed." (O'Brien 130.) This girl is too innocent to know the horror that is occurring around her and she just wants to dance because she loves it. The smoke symbolizes the effect of the war on the soldiers and the girl, and dancing represents a way they each cope with it. Before the girl is introduced, O'Brien states, "There was no music. Most of the hamlet had burned down, including her house. We found her family in the house. They were dead and badly burned" (129). War is a thing of horror in this scene, as everything burns down to ashes and nothing is left. Burning down represents the soldier's lives sort of "burning down to ashes" when they get drafted to the war at first. The lack of music shows the dull, depressed environment of Vietnam. The dancing girl shows peace, yet struggle at the same time.