

*The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien - 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Novel  
AP English Language & Composition

Students read this novel independently, paying careful attention to the author's style, organization, diction, details and figures of speech. You are responsible for identifying and understanding the elements of plot and character as well as identifying and commenting on the stylistic choices made by the author throughout the book.

Some of the themes developed in *The Things they Carried*

- The nature of truth in storytelling
- Fear of shame as a motivation
- Things carried—physical and emotional
- Pressure to adhere to a standard of duty, courage, or patriotism
- War and love

**Reading Schedule**

It is expected that students will have read the assigned section of the book before the day that it is due and will be active and willing participants in discussion on those days. This unit will be treated like a college seminar and students are expected to take part in discussion, just as they would in a college course. Discussion participation credit can be expected on each of the following days. All work for that section of the book will also be collected on that day.

**1.) Due Wednesday, October 2: pgs. 1-64**

“The Things They Carried”  
“Love”  
“Spin”  
“On the Rainy River”  
“Enemies”

**2.) Due Wednesday, October 17: pgs. 65-123**

“Friends”  
“How to Tell a True War Story”  
“The Dentist”  
“Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”  
“Stockings”  
“Church”

**3.) Due Wednesday, October 31: pgs. 124-178**

“The Man I Killed”  
“Ambush”  
“Style”  
“Speaking of Courage”  
“Notes”  
“In the Field”

**4.) Due Wednesday, November 14: pgs 179-243**

“Good Form”  
“Field Trip”  
“The Ghost Soldiers”  
“Night Life”  
“The Lives of the Dead”

**Double Entry Journal**

Students will complete a **double entry (or dialectical) journal** to aid in their understanding of the novel and also demonstrate that understanding to the teacher. In this journal, you are essentially having a “conversation” with the text and with yourself about the writer's style choices.

The **left side** of the loose leaf page is used to take notes on sections of the text you think are important.

The **right side** of the page is used to record commentary and reflections (insights, questions, ideas and thoughts) about the material on the left side.

\*\*\* Review pgs. 42-43 in *The Language of Composition* AND the class website for samples.

<http://pwhsaplanguange.pbworks.com>

## Procedure

- Use a notebook or loose leaf paper to serve as your journal
- Draw a vertical line in the middle of each page in your journal
- At the top of the left column, write the heading “Quotes from [Chapter Title] \_\_\_\_”
- At the top of the right column, write the heading “My Comments and Questions”
- After you read **each essay/chapter** from *The Things They Carried* complete a page (at the minimum **5 entries** per story) of quotes on the left side and comments on the right side.

See rubric for Double Entry Journal for information on how these will be assessed.

As you read, use sticky notes to mark places in the novel to come back to in your journal. Some suggestions for notes include:

- Words, sentences or ideas that seem interesting, strange, meaningful, confusing, or important
- Passages that use noteworthy diction and/or syntax
- Parts that contribute to characterization, setting, conflict, and/or theme
- Literary devices such as imagery and symbolism
- Passages that remind you of something else you have read or seen (connections)

Breaking the text into small sections helps you notice the details in O’Brien’s writing: **specific word and sentence choices**. Collecting these bits of information from the text and considering their impression on you prepares you to answer the following questions about O’Brien’s style: **What effect is he striving for? How does the effect serve the purpose of his writing?**

**What if I do this wrong?** The only way you can be really “wrong” is to not do this at all (i.e. not complete a double entry journal and/or be unprepared for discussion days) There are, however, some things you definitely should not do:

1. Fall behind on the reading. We will have group discussions on the days that the reading is due. Your participation in these discussions is critical and will be assessed for credit. Circumvent your procrastination tendencies (if you have them) by reading a little each night.
2. Decide not to write or read at all because you don’t like the book.
3. Write plot summary. Your teacher has read the book. She does not need you to tell her what happens. Your job is to analyze the book, not regurgitate the events. ☺
4. Use Spark notes or other sources for short cuts. Your teacher looks at those sites regularly. Such resources are to enhance your personal reading experience...not act as a substitute.
5. Copy, plagiarize, and borrow in any way from **anyone or anything** for any reason in your double entry journal or anywhere else in the class for that matter. If you choose to do so, we will then have a meeting in which we discuss this potential “career ending decision” on your part. Do your own work or see me before you lose your mind.

**What if I still really don’t like the book?** Then you must still really read it and justify why you don’t care for it. It is your job as a reader to find interest in a text; it is not the book’s job to interest you...