

Prompt & Thesis Guide: Book Essay 3

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*

General Instructions

- Write a 3-4 page response essay to the prompt below. It should be a critical reflection on the book, focusing on what you learned about the time period. It should show substantive engagement with the text (and not just the topic).

Book Essay 3 Prompt: Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

- O'Brien's book is considered a modern literary classic, but it is technically a work of fiction informed by the author's experience.

Prompt Part 1 - How does the connection between O'Brien as a Vietnam War veteran writing about the war influence the perspective?

- Explain that the work is fictional yet based on a soldier's real experiences. How realistic is the book? What are some reasons why the author may have written the book as fiction rather than as an autobiography?

Prompt Part 2 - How does the author depict the lives of the common American soldier?

- This is the meat – or 'main event' - of your paper.
- Include several paragraphs outlining various aspects of army life during the war. Use specific examples from the book to describe what it was like to be a soldier in the Vietnam War. *Provide a proper in-text citation for each example!*
- You could discuss the horrors of war, the friendships among the soldiers, the way soldiers handled death, the psychological aspects of war life, the coping mechanisms used by soldiers, the physical challenges of war, the way soldiers treated each other and why, etc.

Prompt Part 3 - Which was more upsetting - O'Brien's coarse language throughout the text or his telling of the man he killed (p.118-124)?

- Describe how the inclusion of coarse language impacted the reader's understanding of the war. Did it help to make the harsh reality of the war seem more realistic? Or was it distracting? Did it help the author to tell his tale more accurately or did it detract from the story?
- Describe how the description of the man who was killed impacted the story. Did it help to make the harsh reality of the war seem more realistic? Or was it distracting? Which was more troubling to the reader – the man who was killed or the coarse language?

Be sure to extensively refer to the content of the book! ☺

Book Essay 3: Thesis Statement!

Thesis Statement Examples:

Tim O'Brien's fictional work, *The Things They Carried*, delves into the difficulties and horrors of life as a common soldier in the Vietnam War, using realistic language and imagery taken from the author's actual experiences as a soldier.

Tim O'Brien's fictional work, *The Things They Carried*, is based on the author's actual experiences as a soldier in the Vietnam War and delves into the difficulties and horrors of life as a common soldier using realistic language and imagery.