

The Things They Carried: AP Language and Composition Summer Reading Assignment 2024

Please read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. Copies are available for checkout in the UNI Library.

The attached summer assignment is due on the first day of school.

Students who are not committed to their summer work are not likely to be successful in AP Language and Composition.

AP Language and Composition is a class about rhetoric. We will spend the year analyzing writers' effectiveness. Knowing a writer's purpose is a key aspect of analyzing their texts. Please keep the following blurb about Tim O'Brien and *The Things They Carried* in mind as you read and analyze the novel, which is part memoir/part fiction. *The New York Times* calls *The Things They Carried* a "marvel of storytelling which matters not only to the reader interested in Vietnam but to anyone interested in the craft of writing." In AP Lang, we are indeed "interested in the craft of writing."

Tim O'Brien wrote parts of *The Things They Carried* 20 years after his service in Vietnam. In 2010, 40 years after the war, he stated, "I carry the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam – the people of Vietnam, my fellow soldiers. More importantly, I carry the weight of responsibility, and a sense of abiding guilt. I carry joyful memories, too, friends I made and the conversations at foxholes where, for a moment or two, the war would seem to vanish into camaraderie and friendship. The wars don't end when you sign peace treaties or when the years go by. They will echo on until I'm gone and all the widows and orphans are gone."

Your work as you read *The Things They Carried*:

The progression of stories in O'Brien's novel can be grouped by motif. Think about how the groups of stories relate to each other – how they convey similar motifs.

- **Column 1:** Make *SHORT* notes about thematic commonalities that tie the stories together and contribute to progression in the overall story. I have paired the stories for you. If there is only one story listed, you should still jot down ideas about its motif. What do we learn from it?
- **Column 2:** Record a quote/passage that is the most **thematically** crucial/significant in the section. Explain its thematic weight. (You are choosing just ONE quote even if there are two chapters grouped together.)

As much as O'Brien's novel is about his experiences in war, it is also about storytelling.

- **Column 3:** Comment on literary elements at work in each section. Explain and then articulate the "greater effect" (tone, theme, characterization, etc.).

*As a mix of memoir and fiction, *The Things They Carried* is an excellent text to begin our dive into rhetorical analysis.*

- **Column 4:** Use the *Rhetorical Situation introduction* (final 2 pages of this document) to complete column 4. Analyze one aspect of the rhetorical situation for each set of chapters. Be sure to analyze different aspects (the writer, audience, context, exigence, purpose, and the message/argument) throughout your responses. You should analyze each aspect of the rhetorical situation at least once.

Ch .	Title(s)	Thematic Commonalities	The most thematically crucial/significant quote with explanation (Just one per row)	What literary elements do you see in the text? How do they contribute towards a greater effect (theme, tone, characterization, etc.)?	Analyze one aspect of the rhetorical situation. Identify which aspect you will focus on, and then write an evidence chain that includes claim, context, quoted evidence and 2-3 sentences of analysis.
1	"The Things They Carried"	<i>Soldiers as real people with "baggage."</i>	<i>"He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men" (5). The men's baggage is both concrete and abstract. They "hump" equipment while also having to carry their fears and burdens.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>Blending of concrete and abstract nouns → to illustrate the different kinds of weight/burden they carry</i> · <i>Irony: war is ambiguous, but burdens resulting from it are certain</i> · <i>Repetition: Stories retold – in the retelling, they express or maybe pinpoint truth(s)</i> 	<i>Purpose: O'Brien's purpose in "The Things They Carried" is to prove that the heaviest burdens of war may be the emotional ones. After listing the weight of each weapon the men carried, the narrator states, "They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried" (7). O'Brien's diction choices prove that the men are amazed by the destructive power of their supplies, but ironically feel like powerless pawns in the war. His use of the word "terrible" to modify "power" helps readers to see that the men are uncomfortable with, and even ashamed of, the power they wield through the weapons of war they carry. Simultaneously "silent awe" displays their lack of agency through their inability to even speak of that which they carry, thus turning the weight of the weapons into a heavier emotional burden than physical burden.</i>
2-3	"Love" & "Spin"				

4	"On the Rainy River"				
5-8	"Enemies," "Friends," "How to Tell a True War Story," & "The Dentist"				

9	"Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong"				
10- 11	"Stockings" & "Church"				

12-14	"The Man I Killed," "Ambush," & "Style"				
15-16	"Speaking of Courage" & "Notes"				

17-19	"In the Field," "Good Form," & "Field Trip"				
20-22	"The Ghost Soldiers," "Night Life," & "The Lives of the Dead"				

AP Language and Composition: The Rhetorical Situation

The *rhetorical situation* includes the following elements: the writer or speaker, the audience, the (historical) context, the exigence (i.e. what prompted the writer to write), the purpose, and the message or argument.

#1 Analyze the Writer or Speaker

Use information from the passage to examine the writer/speaker. Consider the following:

- Why is this person the “right” person to write this piece?
- What are his/her credentials?
- What are his/her beliefs, needs, and/or values?
- What is her/his relationship with the audience?

#2 Analyze the Audience

While some passages have a clear audience, others will require some inferencing. Typically with letters and speech, the audience is very clear. However, articles and memoirs may have an undefined audience at first glance. As you examine the audience, think about the following questions:

- Who would likely read this source?
- Who would be interested in or opposed to this message?
- How is the message tailored towards the audience?
- What are the audience’s beliefs, needs, and/or values?

#3 Analyze the Context

When you think about context, you want to think about the historical time frame. However, be sure that any historical events you are connecting to the passage have relevance. The prompt will offer key information such as when the speech was delivered or when the letter was written. Think about the following:

- What was happening locally, nationally, or globally at the time this text was written?
- What relevant historical events might have influenced this writer or situation?
- What, if any, specific events are mentioned in the text?
- Why is this message or argument appropriate for this time period?

#4 Analyze the Exigence

The exigence is the catalyst. In other words, what prompted the writer to write? Consider the following:

- What was the catalyst for the passage?
- What event, need, or concern does this passage address? Why is this event, need, or concern relevant to the speaker and the audience?
- What is a particular choice the writer makes appropriate for this occasion?

#5 Analyze the Purpose

In AP Lang, your entire essays will be built on analyzing the author’s purpose, so this element is key to the rhetorical analysis. You want to address why the author makes the choices they do, but also the overall purpose of the passage or article. Be careful not to repeat the same verbiage throughout your essay.

- What was the motivation behind the passage?

- What does the writer hope to achieve?
- What is the writer calling the audience to do?
- Why does the writer make this choice?

#6 Analyze the Message or Argument

In this component, you are examining the main takeaway the author wants the reader to have or the main point the writer is trying to make. Use these questions to dig deeper:

- What choices does the writer make to make his/her message more convincing? (What choices does he/she not make?)
- What does the message/argument reveal about the writer's beliefs, desires, or values?
- Why is this message appropriate for this audience on this occasion?
- What happens if the audience listens to the message? What if they don't?