

***The Things They Carried* – Questions Covering from “In the Field” to “The Lives of the Dead”**

As you read, consider the following ideas, and flag important details:

1. “In the Field” (pg.162-178 paperback / pg.155-170 hardcover) – What is the relationship of “In the Field” to the earlier stories “Speaking of Courage” and “Notes” (p.155-161)? Moreover, why do you think so many stories in this book are about the same event—Kiowa’s death? In what ways is O'Brien's technique of *retelling the same event in multiple ways* consistent with the larger patterning of this novel? What purposes do these retellings seem to *accomplish or emphasize*, and what unique effects does “In the Field” contribute to the larger work?

2. “Good Form” (pg.179-180 paperback / pg.171-172 hardcover) – Do you think “Good Form” casts doubt on the novel’s truthfulness, or not? What effects does O’Brien create by explaining the difference between “happening-truth” and “story-truth”? What other key effects does this short piece create for you? (Be mindful of the fact that Mr. R has talked on multiple occasions about the importance of “form” in literature and why we should try to understand the “form” of each literary work.) Do you feel that “Good Form” increases or decreases your understanding of the novel? Why?

3. “Field Trip” (pg.181-188 paperback / pg.173-179 hardcover) – What is the relationship of “Field Trip” to the earlier stories “Speaking of Courage,” “Notes,” and “In the Field”? Moreover, why do you think so many stories in this book are about the same event—Kiowa’s death? What unique effects does “Field Trip” contribute to the larger work? In what different ways might the presence of 10-year-old Kathleen O'Brien be significant both in this specific story and in the larger novel? On what basis we might juxtapose Kathleen’s presence in the novel with other female characters who appear in the novel—and what interesting ideas emerge from such juxtapositions?

4. “The Ghost Soldiers” (pg.189-218 paperback / pg.180-207 hardcover) - How does “The Ghost Soldiers” provide for us a fuller picture of Tim O'Brien and the war's impact on him? (If it were not included in the book, what crucial information or dimensions of Tim's character would be *missing* from the story?) Are there any parallels between what Tim tries to do to Bobby Jorgenson in this chapter and what Tim tries to do to us as readers throughout the novel? Moreover, what does this selection communicate to us about other characters, such as Azar and Bobby Jorgenson? Finally, why might this story's placement—near the *end* of the novel—be significant?

5. “Night Life” (pg.219-224 paperback / pg.208-212 hardcover) - How does “Night Life” provide for us a fuller picture of Rat Kiley and the war's impact on him? (If this section were not included in the book, what crucial information or dimensions of Kiley's character would be *missing* from the story?) Also, why might this story's placement—near the *end* of the novel—be significant?

6. “The Lives of the Dead” (pg.225-246 paperback / pg.213-233 hardcover) - “The Lives of the Dead” is the final story in *The Things They Carried*. Why do you think O'Brien's novel—a novel about *war*—ends with this narrative? Which specific details and techniques in the story strike you as particularly significant and meaningful? Do you think “The Lives of the Dead” effectively ends the novel and addresses its larger concerns? Consider as many ways you can think of that “The Lives of the Dead” emphasizes and embodies O’Brien’s larger concerns in the novel (including not only *war*, but *death, love, fact vs. truth, why and how writers create stories*, etc.).