

The Things They Carried - The Essay

Name: _____

What is the importance of _____ in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*?

Create your own topic, and put together an intelligent essay of 3-6 pages (must be a minimum of 1200 words). In your essay, you will analyze the significance of one key element or dimension of the novel in order to illuminate the novel's form, impact, and meaning as fully as possible.

Requirements:

1. The goal of your analysis is to illuminate the novel's form, impact, and meaning for your reader. Everything you say about the novel—from generalizations to specific, textual details—should be clearly relevant to that goal.
2. Support all your claims and generalizations about the novel with textual evidence, including the close analysis of significant quotations from the text. Be comprehensive in your study of the text; build each body paragraph of your essay around the solid analysis of multiple significant textual details, including important quotations that you have incorporated smoothly.
3. There is no requirement to research outside sources, but if you do use outside sources, make sure that you properly cite the sources of any information that you incorporate through parenthetical citations and a Works Cited list.
4. The final draft of the essay is due on Monday, December 18th. Create and save your essay in your **APEngLit** folder in Google Drive.

Here are some topic ideas worth consideration:

1. **A Motif** - A motif is an element that recurs significantly throughout a narrative; it is a pattern created by the repetition of an *image*, an *"echo" word*, an *action*, an *idea*, or a *situation* that points to some sort of meaning. Any detail that appears at least two times and forms a pattern can be called a motif. A motif can consist of parallel or recurring images, words, actions, details, or ideas that help communicate meaning in the novel.

Do you notice a set of parallel or recurring images, words, actions, details, or ideas in the novel? If so, what meaningful effects are created by the repetition of this image, word, action, detail, or idea; how does the emergence and recurrence of this motif point toward meaning or theme?

2. **Imagery** - Imagery is language that appeals to specific senses, acting on the imagination via the body's perceptions, and creating key sensations that contribute to tone and mood. (Imagery can be *visual*, *auditory*, *tactile*, *olfactory*, *gustatory*, or even *kinesthetic*.) Authors often present characters, settings, situations, or events in ways that use vivid sensory language. When an author's language appeals to our senses in a powerful way and helps us "see" or sense something with particular vividness, the author is using imagery in a meaningful way. Often a single, specific image within a work—because of its importance in the plot or its relevance to character development or theme—can help to carry or compress the meaning of a work. Additionally, you can discuss the imagery of a work (rather than one single image) by describing how the multiple images created within a work progress in a certain way and suggest certain attitudes and even themes. Here is a useful pair of questions to consider about imagery in a story or poem:

- Is there one central image in the work that illuminates its central conflict and its moral concerns? How does this image accrue meaning throughout the work and contribute to the work's meaning and impact?
- Or, rather than one central image, does the work create a sequence of related images that illuminate the work's central conflict and its moral concerns? How does these related images accrue meaning and contribute to the work's meaning and impact?

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3. **Dualities to Compare & Contrast** - Which dualities (i.e., different forms of twins, doubles, pairs, parallels, and even polar opposites) play an important, thought-provoking role in the story? Choose any interesting duality or dualities present in the novel, and discuss how important similarities and differences between them contribute to the novel's impact and meaning.

A Pair of Foil Characters - Discuss two characters (or possibly even more) whom the novel encourages us to compare and contrast. Identify the meaningful similarities and differences that we should recognize between them, and discuss what can we learn by understanding their key similarities and differences.

A Pair of Related Images, Events, Relationships, or Symbols - Discuss a pair of related images, a pair of parallel events, a pair of relationships, or even a pair of symbols in the novel that seem related. Identify the meaningful similarities and differences we should we recognize between these two elements, and discuss what can we learn by understanding these key similarities and differences.

4. **The Author's Manipulation of Time and/or Plot Events**

While it is conventional for stories to be told in chronological order, sometimes authors choose to manipulate time and present events out of chronological order, or even to repeat one or more events, presenting the same event multiple times.

How does the author manipulate time and the sequence of plot events in the novel—for example, by *not* portraying events in their usual chronological order, or by presenting certain events *more than once*? Moreover, what meaningful effects do these techniques contribute to the novel's impact and meaning?

5. **The Author's Choice/Manipulation of Point of View** - Point of view is the perspective from which a story is told. There are many types of point of view, including the *first-person narrator* (a story in which the narrator is a participant in the action) and the *third-person narrator* (a type of narration in which the narrator is a nonparticipant).

How does the author manipulate point of view throughout the novel (for example, by *shifting* point of view or by using multiple points of view), and what important effects do these techniques contribute to the novel's impact and meaning?

6. **The Importance of an Archetype** - An archetype is a situation, event, character-type, setting, or symbol that appears in myth and literature across different cultures and eras. The idea of the archetype came into literary criticism from the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who believed that all individuals share a "collective unconscious"—a set of primal concepts, symbols, or memories common to the human race that exists in our subconscious.

How does the author incorporate one or more archetypes into the novel in a meaningful way, and what important effects does the presence and development of this archetype contribute to the novel?

Some examples of archetypes in literature are as follows:

- **Situational archetypes:** the journey; father-son conflict; the quest for identity or self-knowledge; the loss of Eden, paradise, or innocence; the quest for justice or vengeance; blindness vs. vision and discernment; the shadow or "dark side" of a person or a society; death and rebirth; the unhealable wound; the fall; the initiation, etc.
- **Character Archetypes:** the hero; the mentor; the knight in shining armor; the damsel in distress; the dragon, monster, beast, or creature of nightmare; the devil or demon figure; the scapegoat; the earth mother; the temptress or femme fatale; etc. An example of an archetypal character is the demon or devil who may appear in pure mythic form, but occurs more often in a disguised form, such as Abner Snopes in William Faulkner's "Barn Burning."
- **Symbolic Archetypes:** light vs. darkness; the maze; the crossroads; water; fire; ice; nature & wilderness vs. society and the mechanistic world; the battle between good and evil; the threshold or gateway to a new world; the underworld; etc.
- For a more detailed description of archetypes in literature, open this document: [Archetypes in Literature](#).

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7. A **Major Character** - Key Traits and the Character's Importance

8. A **Minor Character** - Key Traits and the Character's Importance

9. A **Specific Symbol**

10. Any other element or dimension of *The Things They Carried* that you find intriguing, significant, and potentially illuminating...