

"The Things They Carried"

1. What is section 1 about? Section 2? Section 3? Do you detect a pattern? What is it?
2. When is Lavendar's death first mentioned?
3. When is his death first described?
4. What do the following words or acronyms refer to? RTO, Grunt, KIA, PFC, SOP, "freedom bird," "hump."
5. Why do you think Rate Kiley, the medic, carries M&M's for "especially bad wounds"?
6. What does Lt. Cross think about all the time?
7. What were the soldiers doing when Lavendar was killed?
8. What is the "good luck charm" that Norman Bowker carries?
9. What was the young dead VC boy carrying? How does what he carries differ from what the American soldiers carry?
10. What did the platoon do in the village of Than Khe?
11. How does Kiowa feel about Lavendar's death?
12. On page 14, what is the main idea of that paragraph?
13. What was, "in many respects...the heaviest burden of all"?
14. What were they more afraid of than dying?
15. What did Cross do with Martha's pictures after Lavendar's death?

16. How did his feelings for her change?

17. What might Martha stand for or signify?

18. How does Lt. Cross change his way of commanding after Lavendar's death?

"Love"

19. What could Jimmy Cross never forgive himself for?

20. How did Jimmy get a new picture of Martha playing volleyball?

21. What does Jimmy ask Tim to do when he writes his story?

22. What does he tell Tim NOT to mention?

"Spin"

23. What do we learn about Azar's character in this story?

24. How was the war NOT like a game of checkers?

25. How did the "old poppa-san" help the platoon? What was his special skill?

26. What does Norman Bowker wish for, more than anything?

27. What does Kiowa say when his rain dance doesn't work?

28. What did Azar do to Ted Lavendar's puppy?

29. What does Azar say about his action?

30. Identify in this story moments of beauty and/or serenity.

31. How is this story structured? What can you say about all these short sections?

32. According to Tim, what are stories for?

"On the Rainy River"

33. How did Tim feel about the Vietnam War while he was at college?

34. On pg. 40, what does he mean by "dominoes"? (hint: what was the "domino theory"?)

35. What was Tim's job in the summer of 1968?

36. What were Tim's options once he received his draft notice?

37. Who did he hold responsible for his situation?

38. Who did he think should go to war instead of him?

39. What did he do at work when he decided to leave?

40. What does Tim say is Elroy Berdhal's role in his life?

41. What sort of person was Elroy? How did Tim know?

42. What was the financial deal Elroy made with Tim?

43. Where did Elroy take Tim & Elroy on the day six?

44. What typical images of boyhood did Tim remember about himself while on the river?

45. Who are the following people: LBJ, Abbie Hoffman, Jane Fonda as Barbarella?

46. What was Elroy Berdhal's role that day?

47. What did Tim end up doing about his situation?

"Enemies"

48. Who broke whose nose?

49. What was the effect of the fight on Jensen?

50. What did Jensen finally do to resolve the conflict between them?

"Friends"

51. What was the pact that Dave Jensen & Lee Strunk made together?

52. What happened to Lee Strunk?

53. What was he afraid of when he saw Jensen, and what did he make him promise?

"How to Tell a True War Story"

54. What happens when you "send guys to war"?

55. What were Curt Lemon and Rat Kiley doing when Curt stepped on the land mine?

56. How does O'Brien describe Lemon's death on pg. 70?

57. Why is it difficult "to separate what happened from what seemed to happen"?

58. What was the mission of the patrol that went up to the mountains?

59. What did they hear while they were there?

60. What did they end up doing about it?

61. On pg. 76, what does Mitchell Sanders say is the moral of his story?
62. What does Sanders later admit about his story?
63. What happened to the VC water buffalo?
64. What did Rat do afterwards?
65. What does "proximity to death" bring with it?
66. On pg. 82, what is the "only certainty"?
67. What wakes Tim O'Brien up at night 20 years later?
68. What did Tim think Curt Lemon must've thought killed him?
69. What does the nice middle-aged woman think Tim should do?
70. What does he want to say to her about the baby buffalo, and everything else in the story?
71. According to O'Brien, what is a true war story NEVER about?

"The Dentist"

72. How did Curt Lemon's visit to the dentist affect him?

"The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong"

73. What was Rat's reputation among the men of Alpha Company, when it came to telling stories?
74. What does Rat insist about his story in this chapter?

75. What was the military discipline like at the outpost?
76. Who were the Greenies and what were they like?
77. Who did Mark Fossie bring to the outpost?
78. What was their plan together, since elementary school?
79. What does Rat say are the similarities between Mary Ann and all of them?.
80. What did Mary Anne begin to do when casualties came in?
81. Where had Mary Anne been the first time she stayed out all night?
82. How did she change as a result of her conversation with Fossie the next morning?
83. How did she respond to Fossie's arrangements to send her home?
84. When and under what circumstances did Rat see her next?
85. On pg. 106, what is Mitchell Sanders' attitude about Rat's way of telling a story?
86. What does Rat have to say about the soldiers attitude toward women?
87. What did the Rat, Fossie, and Eddie find when they entered the Greenies hootch?
88. What kind of jewelry was Mary Anne wearing?
89. What does Mary Anne tell Fossie about his presence in Vietnam?
90. At the bottom of pg. 113, what does Rat say about "the girls back home"?
91. What is the metaphor that Rat uses to explain Mary Anne's experience with Vietnam?

"Stockings"

92. What did Dobbins do with his pantyhose when his girlfriend dumped him?

"Church"

93. What did the monks at the temple help Henry Dobbins do?

94. How does Kiowa feel about the soldiers camping at the temple?

"The Man I Killed"

95. What is paragraph one of the story about?

96. What did the young man hope some day to become?

97. What is Kiowa doing throughout the story?

98. What is Tim doing?

99. What did the boy fear about his performance in battle?

100. How did the other boys at school treat him?

101. What does Tim's examination of the boy's body tell us about Tim's feelings about his death?

102. What was the boy carrying?

103. What does Kiowa keep insisting Tim do?

104. How does Tim respond?

"Ambush"

105. Why did Tim throw the grenade at the young man?
106. What could Tim have done instead?
107. What is the significance of the story's final image?

"Style"

108. What was the young girl doing when the company came to her village?
109. What did Azar do that night?
110. How did Henry Dobbins respond?

"Speaking of Courage"

111. As the story opens, what is Norman Bowker doing?
112. What happened to Norman's friend Max?
113. On pg. 129, what does Max say about the necessity of God as an "idea"?
114. What happened to his old girlfriend, Sally Kramer?
115. How long has he been doing his present activity? (see pg. 140)
116. What day of the year does this story take place?
117. Which one of his medals was Norman Bowker especially proud of?
118. What medal did he almost win?
119. How did the Song Tra Bong change during the rainy season?

120. What was it about the river that especially got to Norman?
121. What did the town not care to know about?
122. What does the word "bivouack" mean?
123. What did the old women of the ville yell to the men when they bivouacked in the field?
124. What did the soldiers realize was the purpose of the field?
125. In the field, what was the difference between courage and cowardice?
126. What happened to the platoon late in the night?
127. Who did Norman hear screaming?
128. What did Norman see in the glare of the red flares?
129. How did Norman try to save Kiowa?
130. What made him fail?
131. What would Norman never be able to do?
132. Where is Norman at the very end of the story, and what is he looking at?

"Notes"

133. What did Norman do to himself in 1978?
134. What did he feel had happened to him in Vietnam?
135. What does he ask Tim to do?

136. What had O'Brien felt smug about?
137. According to O'Brien, what are you doing when you tell stories about your own experience?
138. How did O'Brien feel about the short story he published from a chapter in "Going After Cacciato"?
139. Ultimately, what "ruined" the story?
140. What did Norman have to say about the story?
141. How did O'Brien revise the story for The Things They Carried?
142. Who was "in no way responsible" for Kiowa's death, according to O'Brien?

"In the Field"

143. What is the platoon doing as the story opens?
144. What was Lt. Jimmy Cross determined to do?
145. Did Cross know who the young soldier was?
146. How had Cross been trained to treat his men, and how did he prefer to treat them?
147. What was Cross's opinion of Kiowa?
148. What does Cross begin doing in his head?
149. Who are the three soldiers who are searching for Kiowa's body?

150. Which one is angry at Lieutenant Cross?
151. Which one feels it's no one's fault?
152. Which one is cracking stupid jokes about irony?
153. How did Lt. Cross feel about being a soldier?
154. Who came to Lt. Cross during the night and what did he say?
155. When Cross notices the young soldier again, what does he realize is significant about the boy's movements?
156. What were Kiowa and the boy doing just before the attack started?
157. What does the boy believe about his role in Kiowa's death?
158. What did the boy try to do when he saw Kiowa in the mud?
159. On page 170, who couldn't the young, unnamed soldier be?
160. What is your guess as to the identity of the boy?
161. What is the young soldier actually looking for?

162. Who found Kiowa's body?
163. How many men tried to pull his body out?
164. What did the soldiers feel besides feeling bad for Kiowa?
165. What does Azar say to Norman Bowker about his jokes?
166. What does Norman say about whose fault it was?
167. On page 177, Cross lists everything one could blame for Kiowa's death. But in the field, what must one conclude about the causes?
168. Where does Lt. Cross imagine himself?
169. Do you think he writes the letter to Kiowa's father or not?

"Good Form"

170. Explain the difference between "story-truth" and "happening-truth."
171. According to O'Brien, which one is "truer"?
172. What can stories do?

"Field Trip"

173. What was Tim looking for at the site of Kiowa's death?

174. What is as remote to Kathleen as "cavemen and dinosaurs"?
175. What had the "little field" swallowed?
176. What had the field embodied for Tim, for the last 20 years?
177. What did Tim bring to the field to leave behind?
178. What is the change brought about in Tim by his action in the river?
179. Who might Kathleen symbolize?

"The Ghost Soldiers"

180. Where was Tim wounded the first time he was shot?
181. What was it about Rat's care of Tim that took courage?
182. Where was Tim's second wound?
183. How long did the medic take to get Tim during the battle?
184. What did Tim devote a lot of time to once he "could think straight"?
185. What does Tim say you shouldn't have to feel about being wounded?
186. How did his feelings about his wound and his recovery affect his feelings about Jorgenson?

187. After his second wound, where was Tim deployed?
188. How did his new assignment change his relationship to the other guys in his platoon?
189. What did Tim have to do, "three times a day, no matter what"?
190. After his confrontation with Jorgenson, what did Tim feel had changed about himself after "seven months in the bush"?
191. How did Mitchell Sanders reply to Tim's request.
192. How did Azar respond?
193. What did Tim become as he watched Jorgenson reacting to the noisemakers?
194. What did the guys use next against Jorgenson?
195. How does Azar change the game they are playing against Jorgenson?
196. When he was wounded, what did Tim keep trying to tell Jorgenson, but couldn't?
197. What did Jorgenson do after firing at the white sandbag?
198. What did Azar do to Tim "as an afterthought"?
199. What happens between Jorgenson and Tim afterwards?

"Night Life"

200. What do the soldiers mean by "living the night life"?
201. Who did Tim get this story from?
202. What happened to Rat after five or six days?
203. What did he keep talking about?
204. What usually happened around midnight?
205. What did Rat start to picture after awhile?
206. How does Rat describe "this whole war"?
207. What did Rat do to himself the next morning?
208. How does Cross say he'll explain what happened?
209. What did the guys say to cheer him up about being in Japan?

"The Lives of the Dead"

210. What can stories do?
211. What can happen in a story sometimes?
212. What did the soldiers do with the body they found in the bombed out village?

213. How long had Tim been in the war at that point?
214. How did Tim respond to what the soldiers did?
215. What did Kiowa say about Tim's actions?
216. Who did the old man's body remind Tim of?
217. How old were Tim and Linda when they went out on their first date?
218. What did Linda wear on her head?
219. What did Ted Lavendar do every morning?
220. What did Linda say to Tim after she was dead?
221. What did Nick do one day in the classroom?
222. What did the class find out about Linda?
223. Who walked her home that afternoon?
224. What can you steal in a story? What can happen?
225. How could the soldiers keep the dead alive?
226. How did Tim feel about seeing Linda's body in the casket?

227. What was Tim's "worst day at the war"?
228. What had become "a secret meeting place" for Tim and Linda?
229. What does Linda say being dead is like?