Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM: \_\_\_\_\_

English I: Week 9/22-9/26

**Essential Questions:**

* **Unit EQ:** When memories are faulty, when people’s understanding is lacking, what does it mean to be truthful when retelling an experience from our past? How do we most accurately and effectively convey an important experience to another human being?
* **Week EQ:** To what extent do we need to understand the context in which a book was written in order to understand the book?

**Big Goals for the Week:**

1. Read the chapters, “Love,” “Spin” and “On the Rainy River”
2. (Due Monday 9/29): Write a memoir using the chapters we read as models (see “Memoir Prompt: Love, Spin or Rain ”
3. Complete all writing prompts and smaller homework assignments located below
4. Study for your quiz on Friday (see schedule for Friday 9/26 located below for what the quiz will be over)

**Schedule and Homework for the Week:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** | **In Class Work** | **Homework** |
| **Monday 9/22:** How can we increase our understanding of what we read? | * View video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGEDTB-UEcg> * Share out memoirs * Understand the context of the book:   + Vietnam War:     - Simplified <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0t-YBemwzs>     - Forrect Gump <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1gstYyZF5A>     - Read “Conscription and the U.S. Draft” | * Read “Tips on Reading a Collection of Linked Short Fiction,” (in packet) * Fill in the chart on your book mark |
| **Tuesday 9/23:** Mastering the rhetorical strategies | * Review “Tips for Reading…” * Review each of the rhetorical strategies * Read with a partner using the rhetorical strategies | * Read the chapters, “Love” and “Spin” * Create at least one annotation for every page you read. Use your bookmark as a reference for what to annotate |
| **Wednesday 9/24:** Using annotations to generate discussion | * **Minimum Day** * Do-Now: Writing Prompt * Discussion based on annotations | * Read the chapter, “On the Rainy River” * Create at least one annotation for every page you read. Use your bookmark as a reference for what to annotate * Answer the Socratic Seminar questions (located in packet) |
| **Thursday 9/25:** Who is the narrator? Can we relate to him? | * Do-Now: Writing Prompt * Socratic Seminar * Read “Tim O’Brien (b. 1946)” and “Interview with Tim O’Brien” | * Begin writing your memoirs: “Love Spin or Rain” * Get a head start on the reading for next week: pg 62-116 |
| **Friday 9/26:** Independent Reading and Quiz | * Quiz   + “Tips on Reading” and Rhetorical Strategies   + TTTC: Understand the major events in “Love” “Spin” and “On the Rainy River”   + Handouts: “Tim O'Brien,” and “Conscription and the U.S. Draft” * Independent Reading | * Complete one entry of your independent reading log for Monday * Complete memoir “Love, Spin or Rain” |
| **Next Week:** More reading! More writing! More discussions! More TTTC! | * Analyze the fallibility of memories * Analyze our failure as human beings to communicate what is important to us. * Being creating your cameras | * TTTC Reading for Next Week: (pg 62-116) “Enemies,” “Friends,” “How to Tell a True War Story,” “The Dentist” and “Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong” * Write two additional memoirs |

**Monday 9/22: Context of the Vietnam War**

1. **Vietnam War Simplified:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0t-YBemwzs**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0t-YBemwzs)
   1. What started the civil war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam?
   2. Why did the U.S. get involved?
   3. Why did the Vietnam War become unpopular?
2. **Forrest Gump:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkLHBXPYWuI**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkLHBXPYWuI)**,** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1gstYyZF5A**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1gstYyZF5A)
   1. Why was Forrest considered such a good soldier by his drill sergeant?
   2. If Forrest and Bubba weren’t voluntary soldiers, why did they have to go to war?
   3. What do you notice about the setting, Vietnam?
   4. What most struck you about this movie clip?
   5. Take out the “Soldiers’ Possessions from Thursday. What similarities do you see between the soldiers you wrote about for TTTC, and the soldiers in *Forrest Gump*?

**Thursday 9/25: Socratic Seminar Questions**

*Directions: Answer FOUR of the following six questions in your writer’s notebook. Choose any four you’d like.*

1. *Why does O’Brien say, “I survived, but it’s not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war” (61)?* Do you think O’Brien is a coward? Do you think going to war is cowardly? Would you feel the same as him? Use at least one quote to support your response.
2. *“All of us, I suppose, like to believe that in a moral emergency we will behave like the heroes of our youth, bravely and forthrightly...if the stakes ever became high enough--if the evil were evil enough, if the good were good enough--I would simply tap a secret reservoir of courage that had been accumulating inside me over the years” (39).* Do you think courage is something you can store up, or do you have to practice it on a daily basis in order to be courageous?
3. *“I was too good for this war. Too smart, too compassionate, too everything. It couldn’t happen. I was above it” (40).* What does O’Brien mean when he says he was “too good”? Use textual evidence to support your response. Do you think you are above going to war? Why or why not?
4. *“There should be a law, I thought. If you support a war, if you think it’s worth the price, that’s fine, but you have to put your own precious fluids on the line. You have to head for the front and hook up with an infantry unit and help spill the blood. And you have to bring along your wife, or your kids, or your lover” (42).* Do you think this is a good idea: to have those who support the war fight it? Why or why not? What would that look like in our society?
5. Why does O’Brien have his main character work at a pig slaughterhouse? What symbolism is present there?
6. Why does O’Brien think that the old man, Elroy Berdahl, saved his life?

**Friday 9/26: Memoir Prompt: Love, Spin or Rain**

*Directions: As discussed in class, and mentioned by O’Brien in his interview, each chapter of the book can stand alone (as a story in and of itself). This week, we’ve been using his chapters as models for creating our own memoirs. For the Do-Now writing prompts that you started in your journal, expand upon ONE of these to create a full page memoir. Try incorporating the rhetorical strategies we’ve been discussing in class, such as imagery, metaphor, symbols and selection of detail.*

* ***Love:*** *Write about a time when you showed someone or told someone that you love them. Or, write about a time when someone showed or told you that they love you. What was the context of this event? Where did this take place (setting)? How did you and they react? What happened next?*
* ***Spin:*** *In this chapter, O’Brien reflects upon the year he spent in Vietnam. Some of his memories are just flashes of images. Others are strings of stories. Write about an entire year in your past. What do you remember from that year? Write about the fragments of memory, those flashes of images like a camera, as well as the narratives that you remember.*
* ***On the Rainy River:*** *In this chapter, O’Brien shares how he made the difficult decision to go to war rather than flee to Canada. Write about a time when you felt torn between one decision and another. What was the decision? Think about how O'Brien leads us through this chapter, unveiling his deepest fears to his readers. Try to be as honest as O’Brien in your own memoir.*

Janna Bunosky

English I

Janna

9/21/14

Spin: Freshman Year of High School

Driving to school with my brother. That case of burned CDs in the middle compartment. Something Corporate songs: Punk Rock Princess, Cavanaugh Park, Konstantine. New Found Glory, Dashboard Confessional, Good Charlotte, The Clash: “Elevator goin up!” Mixed CDs from girls who decorated the tops with bubbly letters in sharpie ink or from boys who could care less about those things and scribbled the album’s name in tiny print.

My schedule printed out on computer paper:

1st Period: Intro to Catholicism - Mrs. Harmon

2nd Period: English - Mrs. Kutilik

3rd Period: Accelerated Physical Science - Mrs. Zullo

4th Period: Lunch - Mr. Skibbens

5th Period: Accelerated Algebra - Mrs. Something or other. I don’t remember now.

6th Period: P.E. - Mrs. Douglas

7th Period: Spanish - Ms. Harmon

All female teachers freshmen year. I never noticed.

Pope John Paul II hanging up against the brown brick wall, the first sight you see as you walk into the school’s main entrance, soon to be replaced by Pope Benedict in his bright red robe and angry smile, but on that August day, no one knows that yet.

A cell phone rings that first day in English class. The teacher is a woman whose age is impossible to know from all of the tanning she has done in her life and the packs of cigarettes she’s inhaled. Her legs are sticks and her yellow toenails point out in all directions from her leather sandals like the roots of a tree. She slams the wooden door shut and demands to know: “Whose phone is that?” My heart pounds. I’m so thankful that isn’t my ringtone. “We won’t leave this g-damn room until someone fesses up.” She is visibly shaking with anger.

Finally, an African American girl in the front row reaches down. She breaks down crying. She shows the teacher the phone. It’s her mom calling.

That first entrance into the cafeteria. The urgency to find somewhere to sit, some group of people whom I could ask to sit at their table. Finally I see my friend, Nina, from the dance team. I know I can sit next to her. A boy named Tim is sitting there too. I learn he’s from a one of the local Catholic grade schools, and has an endless supply of dead baby jokes and a limitless capacity to discuss football.

That afternoon, or maybe it was later that week or that month, I watch my brother play golf at The Elks Country Club. I’m the tag-along little sister with her mom, still in her school uniform, watching the other boys tee off on #9. They hold their score cards with both hands as they walked up the fairway, their clubs on their backs.

Football games-sweaty blonde hair on the back of my neck, itchy pom uniform. Seeing classmates and parents and teachers in the stands, their faces lit up from the white Friday night lights. Sock hops afterward in the dark cafeteria. A mass of high school kids jammed near the dj, too afraid to dance alone, outside of the huddle.

I miss my friends from the public school. I miss art class. How stupid it was that I could only take religion and Spanish as electives. Who needs P.E.? I remember thinking. I want to make beautiful paintings like I used to in grade school.

Homecoming: a black dress I spent so much time picking out. I must have tried on a hundred dresses. I wanted to wear something that looked like it was from the 1920’s. I spent so much time imagining the perfect dress, something right out of the musical *Chicago*. Then I saw that 1950’s inspired dress with the toul and diamonds, and I knew that was the one. It reminded me of old photos I’d seen of my grandmother. It would go so well with my black high heels.

A boy walks up to me after school. I’m kneeling at my locker, shoving books in and taking others out. The halls are deserted. He’s standing above me. He says nothing until I look up. My heart sinks because I know what’s coming. I don’t remember the exchange of words, but it’s not long before he’s asking me to homecoming. His friend, Molly, told me he wanted to ask me. I didn’t know many people at the time, but I didn’t want to go with him. He was a foot shorter than me and I didn’t know him at all. I say “I don’t know,” and somehow, that’s okay with him. He asks me the next day, his eyebrows arched in hope and there is no way I can’t admire the stupidity or determination or his silly desire to get to know me. Why would he want to get to know me? I say yes. I remember he smiled this huge smile and actually ran away down the halls.

Homecoming day arrives. I’m embarrassed that my date is shorter than me. My cheeks burn red as I dance with him, and it’s an endless cycle--embarrassment as people around me smile and laugh as if to say “how cute,” then it turns to shame that I’m this embarrassed, then more embarrassment then more shame. What an awful person I was. The flowers he got me were beautiful, the way the stems of white roses and daisies were tied with a black satin ribbon. And all of the girls said he was so excited to go with me. Still. I didn’t want a date that was shorter than me: was that so much to ask?

Hours spent on the computer, staring at the screen like a fly attached to a florescent light, my phone by my side. The glory days of IM-ing my friends, deciding what we should do that night: 7:00 pm was the prime time to be on aol. Practically the whole high school would be online just waiting for the night’s festivities to be decided over the phone lines, not a single word spoken.

I remember lying in my bed with my new shiny green ipod with the white spinny wheel next to me: the ipod mini. Watching the songs fly out of focus as I searched for something to fall asleep to. I strategically added and subtracted albums, trying to get as close to the 1,000 song limit as I possibly could (it was only a 2g).

Faces: Haley Jones--beautiful blue-green eyes and dark tan skin. Tyler and his bright red hair. Tim and his braces and freckles. That one girl who looked like a blonde version of Topanga from *Boy Meets World*. The easy way she talked with the junior guys.

Walking in the middle of neighborhood streets. Going over people’s houses I would never step foot in otherwise. A drunken dad holding a beer can to his lips. A dirty bathroom upstairs. Wondering when we could go home. “Wasn’t that fun?” Nina asked afterward. “Really fun!” I lied.

Getting braces in January. Eating nothing but jello for a week as the thick rubber created a gap between my back molars, feeling like one of those pool toys as they sink slowly to the bottom when I looked at the metal across my teeth for the first time. How unattractive my reflection was. The nurse hands me a key chain with all different colored pieces of rubber. I try to discern which rubber band color would be the least conspicuous against my teeth. Dark blue? Bright pink? Light pink? Orange? Definitely not yellow. Anything but yellow. Turquoise? Why so many color options? All the office needed, I thought, was the one that everyone decided was the least conspicuous. The colors decorating your teeth were not the place to show your individuality, I thought.

Every month a note for the front office. A trip to the orthodontist 50 minutes away. Pain always ensued--the tightening, the new rubber bands, the creative ways Dr. Rose chose to torture me with. Rubber bands that would hang down like fangs from top row to bottom row and would break and fly across the room in the middle of a conversation, spit inevitably flying everywhere.

Soccer came in the spring. I remember team bus rides where we decided for each other what kind of animal they would be based on facial features or personality. Kayle is Miss Spider from the children’s book. Kristina is E.T. (we’ve bent the rules to include aliens because the resemblance is just too perfect). They decide that I am a gazelle, “a graceful ballerina gazelle leaping through the fields,” is how Kayle described it.

Rides in the gator to the neighborhood pizza place with Kristina and Kayle. One day, Kristina brought a toy baby with her, an extra credit project for her religion class. We flew so fast over the bumps in the road and the wind was so loud in our ears we didn’t realize the toy baby was screaming at the top of its lungs. Kristina failed her extra credit. The record on Monday showed she had abandoned her baby, let it cry too long before turning the key in its back to soothe it.

All those drives to and from school with my brother. Silent drives most of the time, just sitting in the leather passenger seat listening to the same mixed CDs we both loved, over and over again. Snow, slush, rain, clouds, sun. A whole year with a different sky each day. The little cow, given to Scott by the girl he went to Winter Ball with, sitting loyally at the dashboard, smiling out at the back window.

Janna Bunosky

English I

Janna

9/22/14

Love

I am terrible at giving gifts. I am quite possibly the worst gift-giver in the whole world. There might be someone, somewhere in Italy or Antarctica who is worse, but I sincerely doubt it.

Here’s why I’m so bad: if I’m getting a gift for a female, I’ll spend hours searching the internet and hours wandering the mall. I’ll find the perfect gift, but then something happens inside me--an inability to let go because I want it all for myself. So, I usually end up keeping it for myself and finding a less-cool, less planned gift to give away. If it’s a gift for a male, I don’t have that same problem of wanting the thing for myself, but instead, I’m so lacking in my understanding of their hobbies that I usually just buy the first thing I see and go home. Mind you, this is a confession. I am not proud of these things and I really wish I could change.

My boyfriend, on the other hand, is the best-of-the-best at gift giving. His gifts to me include a set of Barnes and Noble classic books, a wooden jewelry box, diamond earrings, a ring with a tiny canary diamond to replace the ring he had previously given me, which I had lost in the snow one Christmas Eve.

One year, he bought me an 8 inch chef’s knife made by Global that I had been ogling ever since I saw a chef at USD use it so effortlessly to cut onions. It has a beautiful stainless steel handle and the sharpest blade I’ve ever seen.

Another Christmas, he sent me a giant dictionary published in 1877, complete with little stories on the origin and historical uses of words. He knows I love words, especially words that are funny to say like “Katmandu” and “phlebotomy.”

The best gift he ever bought me was an antique pocket version of *Romeo and Juliet* he’d bought from a small bookstore in Oxford. It’s about the size of a human heart, and it’s bound in red leather. He left the book on my desk for me to find after I rode the bus with him to the London Heathrow airport.

I remember coming back to my dorm at St. Clairs, climbing the stairs to the top floor, unzipping my brown puffy winter coat, and wiping away tears for about the seven hundredth time. I saw the little book and I immediately thought about the hour we’d spent in that little bookstore he’d found in an alleyway off of the main street. I could see a wad of 20 pound bills stuffed in the middle pages and a tiny slip of loose leaf that read, “Love, Gene.” I was so broke by that point in my semester abroad. I was living off of carrots, hummus, whole milk, and Britain’s piss poor excuse for coffee. I was spending my days in the Blackfriar’s library, not wanting to go a day without sitting at one of those perfect wooden tables surrounded by all those wonderful books, and also not wanting to spend any more money than I had to. I guess Gene saw all of that. When he visited, he took me to tea at the Royal Tea House, and we shared the best chicken pot pie I’d ever had at The Eagle and Child. We roamed stores. I showed him Blackwell, the famous bookstore and the museums I particularly liked. He showed me little treasures of Oxford he’d found while I was in class. We sat on park benches and stared up at the sky.

I remember sitting down at the desk. I picked up the book, took out the money and set it aside. I opened up the little book to the first page and began reading: “Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Verona, where we lay our scene.” I closed the book and cried. Stupid painful tears. I don’t remember the days after he left Oxford, but I remember all of the other days after he left other places: very dark days filled with self pity and the strange, empty feeling of missing someone. I kept that book in my purse for the longest time. I even travelled to Amsterdam and Italy with it tucked in my green bag.

A few days ago, a student randomly said to me, “Define love.” I don’t really know what love is, to be honest, so I said, “Love is awful I guess,” and I walked away. He probably thought I was a crazy teacher, one with a few bolts and screws loose. But I thought about it some more, and that’s the definition that I understand. Love hurts. It’s when your eyes fill with tears when you see a little red book on a desk because someone was watching closely enough to notice that you picked it up. It’s the feeling of a forty pound weight pressed against your chest when that same person gets up and leaves because he’s in the Coast Guard and you’re an undergraduate student at a private university with a sack full of college debt. It’s not knowing whether you can handle another return home from that person because you just started to heal from the last time. Most of all, it’s that callousness that violinists and guitarist get on their fingertips when they grow so used to pressing down on the strings for hours on end, day in and day out: a hardness born from persistent pain, a hardness that’s too smart to go away again. Maybe this time when he comes home again, that callousness, that numbness, won’t go away as it has so many times before. Maybe my heart won’t welcome him back in. I both fear and hope for that. Well, that’s what I know about love. And if I could give it away, it’s probably the only thing I would easily give. And I’m not proud of that. But after all, I’m terrible at giving gifts.

#### **Additional Resources**

#### Major Characters in the Book

* **Tim O'Brien** is the narrator who never wanted to fight in the Vietnam War and remains haunted by memories even 20 years after he returns to America.
* **First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross** is a solitary, pensive platoon leader who cares about his men. He carries photos and letters from the girl he loves back home in New Jersey, who doesn't love him back.
* **Bob "Rat" Kiley** is a likeable and skilled medic who braves danger to keep his fellow soldiers alive. He carries comic books, brandy, and M&Ms.
* **Kiowa** is a kind and moral soldier from Oklahoma, a Native American, a devout Baptist. He carries an illustrated New Testament, worn-out moccasins, and his grandfather's feathered hunting hatchet.
* **Norman Bowker** is a quiet boy from Central Iowa who strives to live up to his father's expectations and finds he can't relate to anyone back home after the war. He carries a diary and a thumb cut from a Viet Cong corpse.
* **Henry Dobbins** is a large, strong, dependable, unsophisticated machine gunner. He carries extra rations and wears his girlfriend's pantyhose tied around his neck.

*"They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried."* —Tim O'Brien, from *The Things They Carried*

#### **Tim O'Brien (b. 1946)**

*Before Tim O'Brien was drafted into the army, he had what some would consider an all-American childhood. He was born on October 1, 1946, in Austin, Minnesota, and raised in Worthington, a small prairie town in the southern part of the state. His mother was an elementary school teacher, his father an insurance salesman and sailor in World War II. O'Brien played Little League, dabbled in magic tricks, and spent much of his youth in the county library daydreaming about such characters as Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.*

*At Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, he received good grades and became student body president. Occasionally, he'd attend peace vigils and protests against the burgeoning war in Vietnam. He graduated in 1968 with a B.A. in political science and thought of becoming a writer, inspired in part by his father's personal accounts of two World War II battles, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, published in The New York Times. Then O'Brien got his draft notice. He once recalled in an interview that "even getting on the plane for boot camp, I couldn't believe any of it was happening to me, someone who hated Boy Scouts and bugs and rifles."*

*O'Brien spent his tour of duty from 1969 to 1970 as a foot soldier with the 46th Infantry in Quang Ngai province. For some of that time he was stationed in My Lai, just one year after the infamous My Lai Massacre. He was sent home with a Purple Heart when he got hit with shrapnel in a grenade attack.*

*His first writing about his war experiences came in the form of a memoir called If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home, published in 1973 during his graduate studies in government at Harvard University. Soon after, he took a position for a year as a national affairs reporter for The Washington Post, then turned full-time to writing books.*

*O'Brien published The Things They Carried in 1990. His many accolades include a Guggenheim fellowship, a National Book Award, an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships. He nearly stopped writing after his sixth book, In the Lake of the Woods (1994), due to a battle with depression. But following a nine-month hiatus, he began work on a new novel, Tomcat in Love, published in 1998. He currently teaches creative writing at Texas State University.*

*"As a fiction writer, I do not write just about the world we live in, but I also write about the world we ought to live in, and could, which is a world of imagination." —Tim O'Brien*

#### ***An Interview with Tim O'Brien***

*On November 13, 2008, Josephine Reed, Managing Audio Producer at the National Endowment for the Arts, interviewed Tim O'Brien. Excerpts from their conversation follow.*

***Josephine Reed:*** *What is The Things They Carried about?*

***Tim O'Brien:*** *It's a book that centers on Vietnam and a platoon of soldiers. In one sense, it's about the Vietnam War, but it's also about storytelling, how stories rule our lives, how they're told and retold as we look for an elusive truth. And finally, it's about writing itself—writing as an effort to pin down with language the truth about a subject.*

***JR:*** *What is the distinction between truth and accuracy?*

***TO:*** *What we see accurately with our eyes can sometimes be very deceptive. We don't see everything. No historian can fit into a textbook the thoughts of every single soldier in every single war and every single episode. Much is being selected and generalized. So in The Things They Carried, I'm trying to get at this sense of how difficult it is to pin down the truth with a capital "T." In a way, it's a warning against absolutism, against black and white declarations of what's true and what's not true. So part of the effort is trying to display through fiction the ambiguous, blurry, complicated, grayish fog of even the most plainly historical events.*

***JR:*** *I was profoundly moved by the story "On the Rainy River," not only by the character of Tim, but also the old man, Elroy. He seemed as real to me as the man sitting next to me on the train this morning.*

***TO:*** *That's an example of what imagination can do. He's an imagined character—more so, even, than the Tim O'Brien character, who is also, I must say, imagined. But the old guy is made up out of the whole cloth. And yet, he represents something real that you couldn't put your finger on, which has to do with conscience, or being watched by, say, a dead father—that feeling of someone there with you who's not offering advice but is simply present as a kind of moral witness. Old Elroy is meant to stand for a whole bunch of things: my dad, my mom, my country, God, and conscience, all together.*

***JR:*** *I'd also like to talk about your story "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong." It reminded me very much of Heart of Darkness.*

***TO:*** *Yes, it was intentionally structured to be the other hemisphere of Heart of Darkness.Because Kurtz is a man, because Marlow's a man, and because virtually every character in the story is a man, the whole structure of my story is meant to be a female flip of it. In a way, I was trying to put a woman in a man's boots and see if she behaves much differently or feels other things than a man might feel. In a way the point of the story (if stories ever have "points"—and of course they don't, or maybe they have a trillion angles on a point) has to do with the image of the woman as nurturer and peaceful and incapable of the conspicuously violent behaviors of men—which, of course, when you look at history, is totally ridiculous. So the story is meant to be inclusive of women in almost all war stories.*

***JR:*** *You structured this book in such an interesting way. Each individual story is like a small gem, like a pearl necklace. But when you string them together, the cumulative effect is powerful.*

***TO:*** *That's my goal. I wanted to have self-contained stories that I think all chapters of books ought to be anyway. Yet I wanted each story to receive the light of other stories, the way it would in a necklace. Or one gemstone would receive the light of the ruby next to it. Although they are meant to stand alone, it seems to me that in the end, you aim ambitiously for what all writers worth their salt aim at—of making a book of art, of some sort. And that's the sense of pieces being in position, so that they can reflect. So that the pieces are capable of not just reflecting, but absorbing the light of the others.*

#### **The Life and Times of Tim O'Brien**

1. **1940s**
   * 1945: World War II ends.
   * 1946: Tim O'Brien is born on October 1.
   * 1948: With *The Naked and the Dead,* Norman Mailer sets a new standard for American writers about war.
2. **1950s**
   * 1953: Dwight D. Eisenhower is inaugurated U.S. president, heralding a period of economic prosperity.
   * 1954: The French are defeated at Dien Bien Phu. French Indochina is partitioned into Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam.
   * 1955: U.S. offers aid to the South Vietnamese government.
3. **1960s**
   * 1964: An incident between North Vietnamese and U.S. battleships in the Gulf of Tonkin prompts President Johnson to order the first U.S. airstrikes against North Vietnam in August.
   * 1965: The first U.S. combat troops are sent to Vietnam in March.
   * 1967: Nearly 100,000 people march in Washington, D.C., to protest the war in October.
   * 1968: O'Brien graduates from college and is drafted into the army.
4. **1970s**
   * 1970: O'Brien is sent home with a Purple Heart and the rank of sergeant.
   * 1974: President Nixon resigns over Watergate scandal.
   * 1975: Saigon falls to the North Vietnamese, ending the Vietnam War in April.
   * 1979: O'Brien's third novel, *Going After Cacciato,* wins National Book Award.
5. **1980s**
   * 1981: The Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees receives the Nobel Peace Prize for aiding the escape of hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese "boat people."
   * 1982: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall is completed in Washington, D.C.
   * 1985: O'Brien publishes *The Nuclear Age.*
6. **1990s**
   * 1990: O'Brien publishes *The Things They Carried.*
   * 1993: The Vietnam Women's Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C.
   * 1998: O'Brien publishes *Tomcat in Love.*
7. **2000s**
   * 2001: The U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement goes into effect, opening the American market to Vietnamese goods in December.
   * 2002: O'Brien publishes *July, July.*
   * 2010: 20th anniversary edition of *The Things They Carried* is published.

#### **The Vietnam War**

The Vietnam War was one of the longest military conflicts in U.S. history, claiming the lives of more than 58,000 Americans and wounding more than 300,000. Estimates place the number of killed or wounded North and South Vietnamese at roughly four million soldiers and civilians—roughly 10% of the population.

In 1959, North and South Vietnam were divided along what is known as the "17th parallel." The North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front sought to unify the country under Communist rule; the South Vietnamese army struggled to maintain independence. In 1964, the U.S. Congress authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to take steps "to prevent further aggression" and keep the South Vietnamese government from collapsing, or as Woodrow Wilson once pledged, to "make the world safe for democracy."

In 1965, the U.S. sent ground troops to South Vietnam and began a series of bombing missions over North Vietnam called Operation Rolling Thunder. Densely forested countryside prevented the effective use of tanks, provided cover for guerrilla fighters and medical evacuations, and allowed helicopters to transport troops and supplies. By the end of 1966, the U.S. had nearly 400,000 troops fighting in Vietnam; by the start of 1969, the draft was in full force and that number had increased to 540,000.

In mid-1969, strategies shifted as it became more evident to American soldiers, politicians, and citizens that the U.S. efforts in Vietnam were not prevailing. Newly elected President Richard Nixon responded by withdrawing 25,000 troops.

Unlike in World War II, there was no front in Vietnam, the danger was pervasive and unrelenting, and the most common measure of "success" was counting the dead bodies of the enemy. The average age of U.S. service members in Vietnam was 19, seven years younger than in WWII, making soldiers even more susceptible to psychological strain.

Although the war claimed countless Vietnamese civilian casualties, Americans were shocked when they learned about an incident that occurred in March of 1968. In what is known as the My Lai Massacre, members of a U.S. infantry company slaughtered more than 300 Vietnamese villagers, including women, elderly men, children, and infants. As news of this incident and other failures of the war broke in Western publications, the American peace movement gained momentum.

Large antiwar protests spread across America. The morale among troops—particularly those coming home from the war to a country with little empathy for what they had experienced—was low. Suicide, alcoholism, divorce, and unemployment were more rampant among veterans of Vietnam than of any other war in U.S. history until then.

In January 1973, the warring governments signed a peace accord, ending open hostilities between North Vietnam and the U.S. However, the conflict between Vietnamese forces continued until the fall of Saigon in South Vietnam on April 30, 1975.

The complexity of the struggle and the reasons for America's involvement are still widely debated. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is the most famous tribute to the war. Designed by Maya Ying Lin and constructed in 1982, the memorial is a stark black granite wall with the names engraved of American service members killed and missing in the war.

*"War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead."* —Tim O'Brien, from *The Things They Carried*