
The Things They Carried By Tim O'Brien: Character Analysis

Tim O'Brien does an incredible job of blurring the lines of what is true and what is fiction in "The Things They Carried". The story provides a personal view into the minds of soldiers and tells us the emotional and psychological costs of war. For the 17 Soldiers portrayed in the story, the physical pain was very minimal weight to carry compared to the emotional scars that they will carry throughout their entire life. It was those feelings that were the things they carried.

Many of the things that were carried were intangible such as guilt and fear, while others are physical objects, including matches, morphine, M-16 rifles, and M&M's candies. The author Tim O'Brien is a Vietnam veteran himself. He receives his draft notice in June of 1968, and his feelings of confusion drive him north to the Canadian border, which he contemplates crossing so he doesn't have to fight in the war. O'Brien comes to the conclusion that his guilt about avoiding the war and fear of disappointing his family is more important than his political convictions. There are many characters in the story that Tim sheds light on because they have ultimately helped him get through his experience and journey. They all carry their own baggage, but together they helped carry each other.

Kiowa was a Native American soldier on the team. He was probably the most loved one and his death was the hardest to take in for everyone. Kiowa brings the heart to the company with his kindness toward his fellow soldiers and his concern for the people of Vietnam. He helped the others by keeping them calm and keeping them in touch with their feelings. Kiowa made the men feel at home in a sense which was very comforting to the other men. He is fully conscious that he is on someone else land and pays his full respect to the people on it. Kiowa is a Baptist so he carries The New Testament in his pack as a reference to his Christian background. He also carries his grandfather's hunting hatchet which is an important weapon in his culture that he carries to feel a connection with his ancestors. He was killed by a mortar round hit and that caused him to sink headfirst into a marshy field. He resembles the wastefulness of war.

Ted Lavender plays a significant role in "The Things They Carried" because he is not only the youngest of the troop but he is the first character to die. His death inherently marks a change in the narrative. He is a young male soldier who carries marijuana, tranquilizers, and extra ammo to ease his nerves. Lavender was shot in the head outside the village of Than Khe. Morally, all the men feel guilty for it. Lieutenant Cross and Kiowa accused themselves of his death. He represented emotional escapism through drug abuse. Lavender was a symbol of unweighed fear. Through his death, Tim is able to represent how quickly death can happen in the war.

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross played a big role in Tim O'Brien's story. He is the leader of the platoon. He is in a constant state of daydreaming about his love for Martha. Martha was a girl that never loved him back. "On the morning after Ted Lavender died, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross crouched at the bottom of his foxhole and burned Martha's letters." (pg. 22) He loved Martha more than anything even more than his men and as a consequence, Lavender was now dead, and this was something he had to carry with him that left a hole in his stomach and a tear in his heart. Cross had carried the weight of Lavender's dead body physically and figuratively. Through his experience of seeing Lavender killed, Cross was changed into a more focused and

serious person whenever it came to the war.

This book examines the lives of soldiers in the Vietnam war. It examines the soldier's experiences in Vietnam and how they affected them in their lives later on. The things these men would carry were heavy. They were not only physically, but emotionally demanding and took a toll on their everyday lives. They carried guilt, shame, hopes, and dreams. The purpose of the storytelling Tim O'Brien brought to light was turning a war story into a love story by honoring the death of his men that he was very close with to whom he would call family.

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