

## **Title: The Whole Truth- Reflections on *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien**

*Note: This class exercise is meant to be included with a study of Tim O'Brien's **The Things They Carried**. By the time the class has reached this point, they will have read a portion of the book, and have discussed the novel's style and form in class and through journals.*

**Grade:** Primarily 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, but could be modified for other stories and age groups.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be introduced to the possibilities of truth vs. fiction
- Students will be able to write, think about and share their own truths.
- Students will draw connections to the idea of truth within a piece of fiction.

### **Summary:**

This exercise will take place after the students have read "How to Tell a True War Story" in *The Things They Carried*.

1. Teacher shares a memory of his/her life, and asks the students to determine how much of the story is true, and how much of the story is fact.
2. Students will free-write a memory they have that is significant to them- something from which they can emotions and actual events. Topics from which to choose could include:

Pranks on Others

Embarrassing Moments

Sibling Rivalry

Death of a Loved One

Wisdom from a Role Model

Kindness of Others

Mistakes or Consequences

Getting and/or Losing a Pet

Significant Event

Ask the students, how much of their memory is fact, and how much of it is true? Many times in class I would ask them to draw a topic from a hat and write something convincing for the rest of the class to analyze.

3. Students will read a speech by Tim O'Brien regarding his use of story-truth in his novels: <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WritingVietnam/obrien.html>
4. The class will then go into a discussion about "all of it is true, and some of it really happened." Much of what we know to be "true" is actually how we remember something, or how we perceive it. Does it matter what is fact? Why?
5. Students will then split into small groups of four and analyze different quotations pertaining to story truth from *The Things They Carried*. They will look at the context and the meaning, in addition to their own opinions about what the author has to say. Each group will report their findings and discussion highlights back to the larger group

*Note: Eventually, students will produce a mimic of O'Brien's style by using a memory, highlighting their understanding of their truth. This is a piece of creative fiction that is peer revised and shared in groups.*

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