

## Grade 11/12 English Poetry

**Welcome to Harbor Secondary at KAUST**  
(we look forward to seeing you in person very soon)

### **1<sup>st</sup> Assignment for Grade 11/12 English** **POETRY**

**Please read over all three poems below several times.**

#### **"Hope" is the thing with feathers by Emily Dickinson**

"Hope" is the thing with feathers --  
That perches in the soul --  
And sings the tune without the words --  
And never stops -- at all --

And sweetest -- in the Gale -- is heard --  
And sore must be the storm --  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm --

I've heard it in the chillest land --  
And on the strangest Sea --  
Yet, never, in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb -- of Me.

### **Mirror by Sylvia Plath**

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions. What ever you see I swallow immediately Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike. I am not cruel, only truthful--- The eye of a little god, four-cornered. Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall. It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers. Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me, Searching my reaches for what she really is. Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon. I see her back, and reflect it faithfully. She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands. I am important to her. She comes and goes. Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness. In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

### **The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

## ASSIGNMENT

After reading through all three poems several times, choose one you feel best able to create a personal response and analysis for.

The personal response should include a discussion of what the poem seems to be about, what you feel the poet's message is, what ways the poet conveys this message such as style and technique and how the poem makes you feel.

Next, please analyze this chosen poem for the literary feature of motif. A motif is a recurring theme, idea, symbol or other literary feature within a given piece of literature. It is important to know that there is rarely only one right answer and so how you support your own interpretation is of upmost importance. Support would therefore include direct evidence from the poem itself.

Do not worry if you feel you don't understand any of these poems at all – try your absolute best with one of them to type approximately one full page.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment

### English 11/12 Unit: *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien

**1. Please read the background information below for the novel and then follow the assignment instructions at the end of the text.**

#### **The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien**

The author Tim O'Brien is not unlike the character called "Tim" that he created for his novel, *The Things They Carried*, as both author and character carry the stories of similarly experienced lives. O'Brien not only shares the same name as his protagonist but also a similar biographical background. Readers should note and remember that although the actual and fictional O'Briens have some experiences in common, *The Things They Carried* is a work of fiction and not a non-fiction autobiography. This distinction is key and central to understanding the novel.

#### **The Early Years**

Like "O'Brien," Tim O'Brien, born William Timothy O'Brien, Jr., spent his early life first in Austin, Minnesota, and later in Worthington, Minnesota, a small, insulated community near the borders of Iowa and South Dakota. The first of three

children, O'Brien was born on October 1, 1946, at the beginning of the post-World War II baby boom era.

His childhood was an American childhood. O'Brien's hometown is small-town, Midwestern America, a town that once billed itself as "the turkey capital of the world," exactly the sort of odd and telling detail that appears in O'Brien's work. Worthington had a large influence on O'Brien's imagination and early development as an author: O'Brien describes himself as an avid reader when he was a child. And like his other main childhood interest, magic tricks, books were a form of bending reality and escaping it. O'Brien's parents were reading enthusiasts, his father on the local library board and his mother a second grade teacher.

O'Brien's childhood is much like that of his characters—marked by an all-American kid-ness, summers spent on little league baseball teams and, later, on jobs and meeting girls. Eventually, the national quiescence and contentment of the 1950s gave way to the political awareness and turbulence of the 1960s, and as the all-American baby boom generation reached the end of adolescence, they faced the reality of military engagement in Vietnam and a growing divisiveness over war at home.

### **Education and Vietnam**

O'Brien was drafted for military service in 1968, two weeks after completing his undergraduate degree at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he had enrolled in 1964. He earned a bachelor's degree in government and politics. An excellent student, O'Brien looked forward to attending graduate school and studying political science. During the course of his college career, O'Brien came to oppose the war, not as a radical activist but as a campaign supporter and volunteer of Eugene McCarthy, a candidate in the 1968 presidential election who was openly against the Vietnam War.

In 1968, the war in Vietnam reached its bloodiest point in terms of American casualties, and the government relied on conscription to recruit more soldiers. Further, graduate school deferments, which exempted students from the draft, were beginning to be discontinued, though O'Brien did not seek out this recourse. Disappointed and worried, O'Brien—like his character "Tim O'Brien"—spent the summer after his graduation working in a meatpacking plant. Unlike his character, however, O'Brien passed his nights pouring out his anxiety and grief onto the typewritten page. He believes it was this experience that sowed the seeds for his later writing career: "I went to my room in the basement and started pounding the typewriter. I did it all summer. My conscience kept telling me not to go, but my whole upbringing told me I had to."

O'Brien hated the war and thought it was wrong, and he often thought about fleeing to Canada. Unlike his fictional alter ego, however, he did not attempt it.

Instead, O'Brien yielded to what he has described as a pressure from his community to let go of his convictions against the war and to participate—not only because he had to but also because it was his patriotic duty, a sentiment that he had learned from his community and parents who met in the Navy during World War II. "It's not Worthington I object to, it's the kind of place it is," O'Brien told an interviewer. "The not knowing anything and not tolerating any dissent, that's what gets to me. These people sent me to Vietnam, and they didn't know the first thing about it."

O'Brien ultimately answered the call of the draft on August 14, 1968 and was sent to Army basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington. He was later assigned to advanced individual training and soon found himself in Vietnam, assigned to Firebase LZ Gator, south of Chu Lai. (The appendix of this book includes a map of Vietnam, including areas referred to in the novel.) O'Brien served a 13-month tour in-country from 1969 to 1970 with Alpha Company, the Fifth Battalion of the 46th Infantry, 198th Infantry Brigade, American Division. He was a regular foot soldier, or, as commonly referred to in veterans' slang, a "grunt," serving in such roles as rifleman and radio telephone operator (RTO). He was wounded twice while in service and was relatively safe during the final months of his tour when he was assigned to jobs in the rear. O'Brien ultimately rose to the rank of sergeant.

After returning from his tour in March 1970, O'Brien resumed his schooling and began graduate work in government and political science at Harvard University, where he stayed for nearly five years but did not complete a dissertation.

### **The Things They Carried: A brief summary**

Called both a novel and a collection of interrelated short stories, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a unique and challenging book that emerges from a complex variety of literary traditions. O'Brien presents to his readers both a war memoir and a writer's autobiography, and complicates this presentation by creating a fictional protagonist who shares his name. To fully comprehend and appreciate the novel, particularly the passages that gloss the nature of writing and storytelling, it is important to remember that the work is fictional rather than a conventional non-fiction, historical account.

Protagonist "Tim O'Brien" is a middle-aged writer and Vietnam War veteran. The primary action of the novel is "O'Brien's" remembering the past and working and reworking the details of these memories of his service in Vietnam into meaning. Through a series of linked semi-autobiographical stories, "O'Brien" illuminates the characters of the men with whom he served and draws meaning about the war from meditations on their relationships. He describes Lt. Jimmy Cross as an inexperienced and ill-equipped leader of Alpha Company, both in-country and at a post-war reunion. Years after the war, the two spent an afternoon together remembering their friends and those who were killed.

In the introductory vignette, O'Brien describes each of the major characters by describing what they carry, from physical items such as canteens and grenades and lice to the emotions of fear and love that they carry. After the first chapter, the narrator is identified as "Tim O'Brien," a middle-aged writer and veteran. "O'Brien" relates personal stories, among them a story that he had never divulged before about how he planned to flee to Canada to avoid the draft. "O'Brien," who spent the summer before he had to report to the Army working in a meatpacking factory, left work early one day and drove toward Canada, stopping at a fishing lodge to rest and devise a plan. He is taken in by the lodge owner, who helps him confront the issue of evading the draft by taking him out on the lake that borders Canada. Ultimately, "O'Brien" yields to what he perceives as societal pressures to conform to notions of duty, courage, and obligation, and he returns home instead of continuing on to Canada. Through the telling of this story, "O'Brien" confesses what he considers a failure of his convictions: He was a coward because he went to participate in a war in which he did not believe.

As a writer, O'Brien constantly analyzes and comments upon how stories are told and why they are told. For example, he tells the story of Curt Lemon's death and proceeds to analyze and explain why it holds an element of truth. Ultimately, he surmises, "truth in a story is not necessarily due to 'factual' accuracy." Instead, if the story affects the reader or listener in a personal and meaningful way, then that emotion is the truth of the story. O'Brien tests these ideas by relating the stories that others told in Vietnam, like the story of a soldier who brought his girlfriend to Vietnam and grows more and more terrified as she becomes fascinated by the war and ultimately never returns home. The soldiers who hear the story doubt its truth, but are drawn into the story nonetheless, showing that factual accuracy is less important to truth than emotional involvement.

The recurring memory of the novel that O'Brien recalls as a sort of coda, or repeated image, is the death of his friend and fellow soldier, Kiowa. Kiowa was a soft-spoken Native American with whom "O'Brien" made a strong connection. The scene of Kiowa's death in a battlefield becomes the basis for several of the novel's vignettes: "Speaking of Courage," "In the Field," "Field Trip," and "Notes." In each of these, O'Brien recalls snippets of memory and builds an indictment against the wastefulness of the war.

In "Speaking of Courage," the fictional "O'Brien" presents a story that he wrote about a Vietnam comrade named Norman Bowker. "O'Brien" describes Bowker's difficulty adjusting to civilian life after he returns from Vietnam as he recalls his own ease slipping back into the routine of daily life, which for him was graduate school. In the end, in "Notes," "O'Brien" describes how Bowker suggested that he ("O'Brien") write a story about a veteran with problems readjusting and intense feelings of survivor guilt. "O'Brien" realizes that he must not have put the memories of Vietnam behind him because he constantly writes about them. Finally, "O'Brien" remembers a girl from his childhood who died from cancer, the first dead body he saw before being in-country. He describes how as a little boy,

“Timmy,” he could dream her alive and see and talk to her. He recognizes the similarity of his ability to animate her in his mind and his writing about Vietnam.

### **Contextual Background : The Vietnam War**

The Vietnam War was also known as the second Indo China war and was fought in Vietnam between 1959 and 1975. It involved the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation front in conflict with United States forces and the South Vietnamese army. The first Indo China war took place between 1946 and 1954, when the Vietnamese struggled for independence from France. At the end of this war the country was temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam. North Vietnam came under the control of the Vietnamese Communists who had opposed France and wanted Vietnam under communist rule. The south was controlled by non-Communist Vietnamese. The United States became involved in Vietnam because American policy makers believed that if the entire country fell under Communist rule, Communism would spread throughout South East Asia. Therefore, the United States helped create the anti- Communist South Vietnamese government. In 1965 The US sent troops to stop the South Vietnamese government from collapsing. However, the US failed in its goal and in 1976 it became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the war, approximately 3.2 million Vietnamese were killed as well as another 1.5 million Lao and Cambodians. Nearly 58,000 Americans lost their lives.

### **The Troops**

The first combat troops were mainly volunteers. However, the escalation of the war meant that more draftees were needed. In 1965 about 20,000 men per month were inducted into the military. In 1968 this number had doubled. The average age of these conscripts was 19. Those conscripted were mostly from the poorer sections of US society. They did not have access to the exemptions available to upper and middle class youths. By 1968 it was apparent that the draft system was discriminatory and unfair.

### **Costs of the War**

- The US spent \$ 130 billion directly and the same again in indirect costs ( e.g. war widow and veteran benefits)
- Serious inflation in the U.S meant an increase in the cost of living
- 58,000 lost their lives
- 300,000 wounded – half of them seriously
- Many veterans suffered post traumatic stress disorder – 20,000 committed suicide and many suffered anxiety and depression

## Effects in Vietnam

- 10% of all bombs failed to explode and continued to kill and maim long after the war ended
- defoliants destroyed 15% of timber resources and led to a serious decline in rice and fish production – main sources of food in Vietnam
- 800,000 orphans created in South Vietnam alone
- 1.3 million people left the country
- Normal trade relations between Vietnam and the US were finally completed in 2001.

Information taken from enotes, yahoo! education and various history documents.

## 2. Now read the first chapter from the novel *The Things They Carried*.

- **Comment on O'Brien's writing style.**
- **List exactly what the different soldiers carried with them.**
- **Consider the double entendre (double meaning) of the title. Explain what the double meaning might be based on the background information and the chapter you have just read. Discuss why the soldiers carry these things?**
- **Discuss what you think of the novel so far.**

**This written work should be approximately two typed pages and support is necessary for your thoughts/ideas. Remember to draw directly from the background information and novel for your support.**

*Feel free to continue reading if you would like to. See you soon,*

*Mr. White and Ms. Halverson*