



**11th Grade: Summer Reading 2020**

Dear students entering 11th grade,

May 2020

To jump start our discussion of U.S. literature and provide a starting place for our journey, you will read two books and complete two assignments relating to them. You will read:

Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*  
 Tommy Orange’s *There There*

(You may choose to buy these books or borrow them; either way, you should have both available, digitally or in a print copy, for the first ten days of school.)

Assignment 1: *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien

*The Things They Carried* may seem like a collection of short stories, but it is billed as a novel, unified by character and theme. As you read, keep track of the timeline as well as which characters are featured in each chapter. Be an active reader - take notes as you read.

When you have finished your reading, choose four chapters of the novel that do something interesting stylistically and complete the following chart (one quote each for four different chapters). We’ve done three for you to provide examples. The first two represent what we’d like you to strive for in your analysis; the third is an acceptable level of analysis. Be sure your analysis is specific to the language of the quotes, not simply about broad themes of the book.

Quotation	Effect of <i>style</i> on <i>meaning</i>
<p>“They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds” (O’Brien 14-15).</p> <p>chapter: “The Things They Carried”</p>	<p>In this two-sentence quotation, O’Brien chooses to list the dangers and diseases of Vietnam in a form that emphasizes each item and suggests the totality of their weight. By joining his lists with the coordinating conjunction “and” rather than using a comma, O’Brien elongates the list, and the reader is forced to slow down and attend individually to each item. As each item is unpleasant in a visceral sense (“lice,” “ringworm,” “leeches,” “paddy algae,” “rots”), the weight of their unpleasant nature is magnified by O’Brien’s style. As one of his primary purposes in this chapter is to show the reader how hard life was in Vietnam for the everyday soldier, using his words to establish their weight serves to reinforce his theme directly.</p>
<p>“A moral freeze: I couldn’t decide, I couldn’t act, I couldn’t comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity” (O’Brien 57).</p>	<p>O’Brien’s intentional misuse of the colon (he knows the grammar rule) in this single sentence establishes that the action of the sentence, its heart, its main clause, is in the impotence which follows. With no main clause before the colon, the reader feels that the freeze is being personified as a clause of its own. He repeats three times that he “couldn’t,” establishing a lack of action in his</p>

Chapter: “On the Rainy River”	informal use of a contraction, speaking with intimacy about this inability to do what he felt he should do. O’Brien’s negative construction emphasizes what he felt he should have been able to do: “decide,” “act,” “comport.” The final, longer clause (“I couldn’t comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity”) elevates the diction and moves the reader to a more refined and deeply considered moralistic statement; its diction suggests it is something he has considered at some length, a personal moral goal. Together, these clauses form a single sentence that communicates O’Brien’s impotence as a soldier faced with life and death, establishes his self-judgment of his impotence, and states his predetermined philosophy of what he should have been. In Vietnam, according to his this moment in his fiction, he was not what he should have been.
“Star-shaped hole” (O’Brien 124, 126, 128). chapter: “The Man I Killed”	O’Brien’s repetition of this phrase insists that the reader attend to the fatal injury as a visual image. If it is something we must look at, we live with the narrator for a moment in the horror of the war, surrounded not by poetic death but by real death: holes in heads – some of which we may have caused. This repetition makes the moment immediate, alive, and real as Vietnam was for the soldiers.

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Assignment 2: *There There* by Tommy Orange

There are many fundamental questions explored in works of U.S. literature, which we grapple with in our lives and will discuss in the context of our reading. These questions relate to the meaning of freedom, claims to authority, formation of our individual identity, defining a national identity, and tensions between the self and society.

As you read Tommy Orange’s *There There*, keep these questions in mind. Mark passages that relate to one or more of them, and take notes in your book as you read.

When you have finished reading the book, reflect on the intellectual and emotional journey upon which the book has taken you. Now, sit down and compose a very short essay—three to four hundred words—exploring how one or more of the central questions listed above appears within Orange’s novel. Be sure your essay provides sufficient evidence and refers to specific passages and incidents in the book. Edit and proofread carefully; use MLA formatting.

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**You will turn in typed, printed copies of *both* assignments on the first day of class — Wednesday, August 19th.**

If you have questions, feel free to email me -- better earlier in the summer than at the last minute.

Hope you enjoy your summer and your reading!

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