

The Truth in The Things They Carried
****Adapted from the Georgia Learning Connection****

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Subject: Language Arts

Grade: 10-11

Total Time: 1 or 2 55 minute periods

Topic/Essential Question:

-The Vietnam War as seen through the eyes of Tim O'Brien in "The Things They Carried."

-Essential Question: How can we know what is real and what is true in a work of fiction?

Students will tackle this question by referring to a chapter in the book entitled "How to Tell a True War Story." They will ask what they themselves see as characteristics of a true story and what Tim O'Brien sees as the characteristics of a true story. They will then need to take those characteristics and apply them to fiction itself. It will no doubt be difficult and debriefing discussions will inevitably point out that it is extremely difficult to know what the absolute truth is. This will force students to consider their perceptions of the truth and think about how it can be manipulated.

Objectives:

-Students will discover how truth manifests itself even in stories that are not supposed to be real.

-Students will be able to analyze how truth is manipulated and reflected through works of fiction.

-Students will recognize how they themselves determine the truth and how that can be influenced.

Rationale:

For this lesson we're going to use the book we've been reading to study the concept of the truth. Every day we are all exposed to different opinions, different statements, different media and all sorts of news. How do we determine what is true and what is not? We are constantly analyzing the information that we take in on a daily basis for its merits. Even though it happens automatically for us as a daily occurrence, understanding how we do this and why we do this is important to understanding how we come to our opinions and perceptions of the world.

Whenever we read stories in class, they're always called works of fiction (works that aren't true). But does that mean that they are necessarily untrue? Is it possible for works of fiction to somehow be true? Can they reflect truth? Can they manipulate truth? Why would an author want to reflect or manipulate truth? Literature is a valuable tool for understanding reality because of its ability to play with the truth and how we perceive it. Understanding how and why authors are capable of molding the truth in their stories may help shed some light on why reading fiction is so important and why it is so powerful.

Materials:

-The book "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien

-Poster paper, markers and/or crayons

Introduction: 10 Minutes

-Begin by engaging the students in a discussion on how they recognize the truth.

**How do they know when they are listening to or reading a true story/television show/radio show/someone telling a story?

**Can they know?

** What things do they look for when trying to decipher what is true and what is not?

-Discuss. Make a list on the board or overhead from their suggestions. Only write on the left hand side of the board and leave the suggestions on the board so that the students can refer to it in the following activity

Main Activity: 30 Minutes

1. Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 and have them re-scan the chapter entitled "How to Tell a True War Story."

2. Allow them time to refresh their minds on what the chapter was about and where the key lines were.

3. Students will be instructed to search the chapter for where Tim O'Brien lists characteristics of a true story. One person in each group will be nominated the scribe. That person is responsible for recording the characteristics found by the other group members.
4. Teacher will quickly go around the room and ask for suggestions of what Tim O'Brien says are characteristic of a true story. Write those suggestions on the board next to the original student suggestions. Ask for observations of similarities or differences.
5. Distribute two posters and markers to the students.
6. Explain that the students are to make a T-chart on both posters. On the left hand column of the first poster they are to write "TRUE" and on the right hand column they are to write "WHY." On the left hand column of the second poster they are to write "NOT TRUE" and on the right hand column "WHY."
7. Each group will be given a different chapter or section of the book that has already been read thus far. The students will be responsible for going back to that chapter as a group and determining what they think is true and what is not true from that chapter and why they think so. They should fill out the posters accordingly.
8. After finishing their discussion and their posters the class will come back together as a group and share their findings. Each group will present in order of where their chapter falls in the book. They will show their posters and explain what they felt was true/not true and why.
9. When the students finish sharing, the teacher will tape the posters to the wall in the room.

Debriefing/Discussion: 15 Minutes (can also be held off until next period if out of time)

-After all of the groups are through sharing, the students will be asked to look at the posters around them and think about similarities and differences among the "WHY" categories.

**What are some of the common indicators that we use to decipher truth? Are those always reliable? If an author is aware of those indicators, how can he or she play with our beliefs?

-Ask the students groups to think about the line "True war stories do not generalize. They do not indulge in abstraction or analysis."

**What do they think this statement means? Do they agree? Disagree? Why? Students should be able to reference the posters and their own group work as supporting evidence for their opinions.

Homework:

-Write a two page response to the following question:

** Does Tim O'Brien tell a true story according to the ideas that the class had at the beginning of the class period?

**Does Tim O'Brien tell a true war story by his own criteria?

**Do you think he tells a true story?

Remind them to support their opinions. Students will share their answers in the following class.

Assessment: Students will be graded on the following:

-Participation in class discussions and in group work.

-List of characteristics of a true story as told by Tim O'Brien.

-Group posters and depth of thought in their analysis.

-Two page homework journal assignment.