American Literature

*The Things They Carried* Introduction

The Vietnam War/A Film by Ken Burns & Lynn Novik - “The Things They Carried” Vignette

Transcript of Video Clip: Tim O’Brien Reading from *The Things They Carried*

They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself—Vietnam , the place, the soil—A powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared. They crawled into tunnels and walked point and advanced under fire. But it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping, one step and then the next and then another...They made their legs move. They endured.