

Vietnam Literature Socratic Seminar Preparation

The Sorrow of War

Themes:

The Burden of Guilt
The Transcendent Power of Human Contact
The Horrors of War
Loss of Innocence

Style:

Point of View
Setting
Language and Meaning
Structure

Motifs:

Fire
Water
Memory
Writing
Cards

Characterization:

Kien

Key Quotes:

“The stream moans, a desperate complaint mixing with distant faint jungle sounds, like an echo from another world. The eerie sounds come from somewhere in a remote past, arriving softly like featherweight leaves falling on the grass of times long, long ago.”

“There was still too much to do. He had the burden of his generation, a debt to repay before dying. It would be tragic and unjust in the extreme if he were to pass away, to be buried deep in the wet earth, carrying with him the history of his generation.”

“He could feel happy that his soul would find solace in the fountain of sentiments from his youth. He returned time and time again to his love, his friendship, his comradeship, those human bonds which had all helped us overcome the thousand sufferings of the war.”

Psychological and emotional effects of war

Discuss the importance of the letters received by our protagonists at the end of the war.

Perspectives
North Vietnamese soldiers
American soldiers
Others?

Ninh's writing style vs. O'Brien's (techniques, effect on the reader, purpose) & writing about war

Significance of the titles of both works, including *The Destiny of Love* as the original title for *The Sorrow of War*

Survivor's Guilt & Purpose for Writing

Bring quotes of your own!

The Things They Carried

Themes:

The Importance of Truth
Storytelling vs. Memory
The Burden of War
Shame and Guilt

Style:

Vignettes
Metafiction: fiction that refers to or takes places as its subject fictional writing and its conventions

Characterization:

Jimmy Cross
Norman Bowker
Bob “Rat” Kiley

Key Quotes:

“A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth.”

“Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story.”

“They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.”

“War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead.”