

American Literature and Composition Honors
Chapter 1: “The Things They Carried” Lesson Plan
Teacher: Mrs. Kottra

1. The class will begin with a reading quiz reviewing the chapter titled “The Things They Carried.”
2. Then, the teacher will select students to read key passages aloud for the class.
 - Passage One: “First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl named Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey. They were not love letters, but Lieutenant Cross was hoping, so he kept them folded in plastic at the bottom of his rucksack. In the late afternoon, after a day’s march, he would dig his foxhole, wash his hands under a canteen, unwrap the letters, hold them with the tips of his fingers, and spend the last hour of light pretending. He would imagine romantic camping trips into the White Mountains in New Hampshire” (O’Brien 1).
 - Analysis: O’Brien introduces how memory and imagination allow the soldiers an opportunity for **mental escape** from the terrors of the war. As Lt. Cross moves through the daily motions of combat duty, his mind dwells on Martha. He does not merely recall memories of her, but instead imagines what might be such as “romantic camping trips.” Pretending is a form of storytelling. O’Brien underscores the importance of Lt. Cross’s actions by emphasizing the artifacts (Martha’s letters and photograph) he carries.
 - Figurative Language: O’Brien employs the technique of **cataloging** the things the soldiers carry to create fuller composites of the characters, and to make the characters seem more real.
 - Passage Two: “They used a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness. *Greased* they’d say. *Offed, lit up, zapped while zipping*. It wasn’t cruelty, just stage presence. They were actors. When someone died, it wasn’t quite dying, because in a curious way, it seemed scripted, and because they had their lines mostly memorized, irony mixed with tragedy, and because they called it by other names, as if to encyst and destroy the reality of life itself” (O’Brien 18).
 - Analysis: O’Brien constantly remarks on how **the language of war** is purposely constructed to make pain and death seem less real. It is merely the dialogue of an elaborate play, in which they all act their parts.
 - Figurative Language: O’Brien utilizes a **metaphor** to compare the death of a soldier to acting.
3. Afterwards, the teacher will distribute the Characterization Chart to students. Students will divide themselves into cooperative learning groups of two to three students, and work on completing Part I of the Characterization Chart by discussing the connection between the characters listed in the first column from past readings to the soldiers listed in the second column from Chapter 1 and the tangible items they carry.
4. The teacher will review the groups’ responses as a class using the Smart Board to display the students’ answers.
5. Next, students will complete Part II of the Characterization Chart in their respected groups. Students must now provide the name of a character from this year’s past readings, his or her tangible item, and the name of another soldier from Chapter 1, his tangible item, and the direct connection between the two.
6. The teacher will review the groups’ responses as a class using the Smart Board to display the students’ answers.
7. Students will return to his or her seats. Given five-ten minutes, they will be asked to catalogue the items they carry in their backpacks or purses on a piece of loose leaf paper. Students should then choose one item and explain why they “hump” this item with them wherever they go. Next, they will explain the emotional burden this item presents rather than just the physical strength it may or may not take to carry it. Students will be chosen at random to share the item they have listed and will turn in their lists as a final assessment grade at the end of class.
8. Homework: Students should read the next chapters of the novel: “Love”, “Spin”, “Enemies”, “Friends”, and “Stockings”.