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ENGL 388V/ ENGL 101S

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Lesson Plan 1: Considering Inquiry in “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien

**Date to be presented:** 3/13

**Objective:** With this lesson, I hope to take a piece of creative writing and use it to lead into the introduction to the inquiry assignment. This first chapter in Tim O’Brien’s book will be assigned as reading for the students prior to my lesson. After the lesson, the students should have a better idea of how inquiry can be approached from all angles, including creative writing. We can look at this first chapter as a lengthy introduction to a larger version of the inquiry paper.

**Materials:** Students will need a copy of the text. We will be assigning the story over ELMS, so internet access will be necessary unless they happen to have a copy of the book.

**Online Aspect:** Students will participate in a discussion board that will assign the story as homework and ask them to identify examples of O’Brien’s ethos, logos, and pathos to get them familiar with the text and bridge the old material with the new material.

**Time estimate:** 20-30 minutes.

**Lesson Outline:**

In this lesson plan, I have included questions to pose to the students. These questions are meant to be open-ended, but I have also listed some possible answers that will continue the conversation (on the off-chance that the students do not know the answer or there is a lull in the discussion.)

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes)
   1. What are some of the things they carry? What are some similarities with these things? What are some differences?
      1. Tangible and intangible, possessions and feelings, spoken and unspoken
   2. Do you get a sense of the way the platoon feels about the war? What are those feelings? What about how they feel about death?
      1. They feel lost and like there isn’t a clear mission or purpose. They try to cope with death in different ways.
   3. What is the significance of repeating the phrase “the things they carry?”
      1. Repetition represents significance. It gives rhythm to the story. It becomes predictable, gives the audience tangible forward motion through a non-linear story.
      2. Gives the reader a feel for the lack of motivation the troops felt. They did not know their purpose, but they knew what to carry.
2. Transition into Inquiry (5 minutes)
   1. What kind of rhetorical appeals is O’Brien using?
      1. Ethos: experience as a Vietnam vet, victim of PTSD, fought in this platoon even though he changed names and removed himself.
      2. Logos: using the actual weight of the things they carry, demonstration knowledge of equipment, location, procedures
      3. Pathos: colorful emotional rhetoric, tone and diction
   2. Think about your own topic. What would your rhetorical appeals look like? Your ethos, pathos, logos?
3. Inquiry (8-10 minutes)
   1. Imagine that Tim O’Brien is here and is writing an introduction to an inquiry. What questions is he asking implicitly or explicitly?
      1. He could be asking questions about the overall feelings of confusion and anxiety that the people in the US and the soldiers in the war feel.
      2. How do soldiers deal with death?
         1. Can we ever know the answer to this? How do we write about a question we cannot know the answer to?
   2. How can these rhetorical devices (imagery, diction, tone, figurative language) lead us to ask questions about the world around us in a new way?
      1. Combination of fact and fiction: in terms of genre
   3. This is a real person dealing with real trauma and attempting to make peace with this trauma. What is he asking us to consider in this chapter?

**Method of Testing:** Because this is a blended course, we will use an online day to assess the lesson through a discussion board. The board will ask the students to examine a passage from TTTC and ask three questions they have about the experiences Tim O’Brien decided to share with us. These questions can be things they still aren’t sure about, things they’d like to know more about, or questions that O’Brien’s work lead them to ask about the world.

Catherine and I decided to use this chapter from “The Things They Carried” because we are both familiar with the text and find it fits the 1960’s theme of our 101S section. The figurative language and creative aspect of the chapter is meant to enlighten the students to a different perspective on the inquiry assignment. I learned about this book in an English class I took I community college from a professor that was a Vietnam vet that knew Tim O’Brien personally, so I have some extrinsic experience with the text from a secondary source.