

The Things They Carried

Discussion Questions

1. The narrator of *The Things They Carried* has the same name as the book's author. How did this affect your response to the book?
2. In the title story, how do the things the men carry help define them as individuals? What are some of the more interesting items? Which "things" were unexpected? What would you carry if you went to war?
3. At the end of "On the Rainy River," the narrator says, "I was a coward. I went to the war." What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
4. In "How to Tell a True War Story," what does the narrator say on this subject? What do you think makes a true war story?
5. In "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," what causes the transformation in Mary Anne Bell? How does Rat Kiley's telling of the story add to the tension? What does the story say about the Vietnam experience?
6. In "Speaking of Courage," the narrator says, "Sometimes the bravest thing on earth was to sit through the night and feel the cold in your bones. Courage was not always a matter of yes or no." How does the narrator define courage? How do you define it?
7. In "Good Form," the narrator says, "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." What does he mean by "story truth" and "happening-truth"? Why might one be "truer" than the other?
8. The narrator of the story "The Ghost Soldiers" says, "When you're afraid, really afraid, you see things you never saw before, you pay attention to the world." What might he mean by this?
9. Even though *The Things They Carried* is set during the Vietnam War, in what ways is it relevant today, with regard to war and politics as well as our personal struggles?

Questions from the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read website.