Denise Sanchez

Dr. Grogan

Approaches to Literature

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“The Things They Carried” Response

While introducing protagonist Jimmy Cross in the short story “The Things They Carried,” Tim O’Brien states that he carries around letters from a girl named Martha. The narrator also goes into great detail as to what the other men in the squad carry, which range from mosquito repellent and marijuana to pocket knives and chewing gum. Some of the other things mentioned depended on the soldier’s ranking and specialty. While the squad is on a mission, Cross’s thoughts drift to Martha. One of his soldiers, Ted Lavender, is shot in the head while returning from urinating. Cross feels guilty for what happened to Lavender and so the next morning he burns the letters and pictures from Martha and promises to stop fantasying and to focus on his job as a leader.

The story points out that the things that the soldiers carry are both physical and emotional loads. Jimmy Cross has to mentally deal with the fact that one of his soldiers got killed due to something that he could have prevented. Soldiers in the war have heavy emotional burdens because of the horrors they witness and experience. By the story’s end, Lieutenant Cross changes and learns that his distraction is playing a dangerous role for everyone. He shows growth by burning the letters and eliminating anything that is associated with Martha. In connection with “Babylon Revisited,” both of the main characters in each story are trying to learn from their mistakes and overcome them. They both are struggling mentally and are suffering the consequences of their actions.