Lesson Description

After reading *The Things They Carried* as a summer assignment, students will begin their 11th grade year with an introduction to archiving and the creative process. This mini-unit will expose students to various aspects of the writing process including drafting, revision, and editing. Students will view drafts of chapters from O’Brien’s archive and compare them to the final, published text. Additionally, students will review close reading and annotation skills, will work in groups to explore how an author’s choices create meaning, and will create a pastiche modeled after the chapter, “The Things They Carried.” This mini-unit provides teachers and students the opportunity to get to know each other and establish a collaborative environment.

Objectives

- Independently, in composition notebooks, students will respond to warm-up questions, drafting continuously for 10 minutes.
- Through whole-class discussion, students will explore the definition of an archive by viewing the Harry Ransom Center’s website and discussing the role of archiving in their own lives.
- In teacher-created groups of 3-4, students will work together to compare drafts from *The Things They Carried*, identifying and qualifying 5-10 changes in each passage.
- Independently, students will imitate O’Brien’s revision process and make a minimum of 5 revisions to their own drafts.
- In jigsaw groups, students will explore the context of *The Things They Carried* through archival materials.

Enduring Understanding(s) & Essential Questions

1. Because authentic revision requires a combination of exploration, deliberation, and time, effective writers commit to the process with an open mind and perseverance.
   - What are the steps of the writing process?
   - What changes did O’Brien make in his drafts?
   - How do these changes create meaning in the final version?
   - Why/How is punctuation important to the development of a theme?
   - What is the difference between revising and editing?
   - Why was the “Mary Anne” chapter cut from the final draft, and how does this change our understanding of “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”?
   - What is the purpose of revision?
   - Who is involved in O’Brien’s revision process?

2. The archiving process preserves the context of a work, allowing for an increased understanding of theme and tone.
   - What is an archive?
   - What sorts of archives exist?
   - How does your personal archiving (scrapbooks, emails, social media) reveal how you want to be remembered?
   - How does O’Brien’s archive (fan mail, military letters) reveal how he wants to be remembered?

   How do materials from O’Brien’s archive change or enhance your understanding of the published work?
• Why do people want to leave a legacy?

**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Target standards)**

**English III, grade 11:**

(5) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) evaluate how different literary elements (e.g., figurative language, point of view) shape the author's portrayal of the plot and setting in works of fiction;

(7) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the meaning of classical, mythological, and biblical allusions in words, phrases, passages, and literary works.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.

(17) Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity.

(18) Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.

(19) Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.

(26) Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.
Pre-requisite Knowledge and Skills

- Finish reading *The Things They Carried*
- Familiarity with
  - literary terms—syntax, metaphor, diction, tone, mood, repetition, imagery
  - close reading and annotation
  - the writing process

Vocabulary

- Archive
- Pastiche
- Abbreviations and military terms used in the text.
- Jigsaw—
  Divide groups into 5 or 6 person “expert” groups. Each expert group receives a specific segment of material to learn. Expert group members should take notes and prepare a presentation on the material. “Home” groups are formed with one member from each “expert” group. This should result in groups of students who all read/viewed different segments of class material. Students in “home” groups teach each other the material they learned about and take notes during peers’ presentations. For more information: https://www.jigsaw.org/#overview

Time Required

3-4 90-minute class periods (270-360 minutes total)

Materials Required

- A copy of *The Things They Carried* for each student
- Writer’s Notebooks or composition books for each student
- Sticky notes and pencils for annotation
- Photocopies of “The Real Mary Anne” (available in the “Tim O’Brien, Deleted Chapter” document – contact Lori Hahn at the UTeach-LA office to request an electronic copy of this PDF)
- Photocopies of “Tim O’Brien Revision Packet” (contact Lori Hahn at the UTeach-LA office to request an electronic copy of this PDF)
- Jigsaw materials (available in the “Tim O’Brien, Jigsaw Materials” document – contact Lori Hahn at the UTeach-LA office to request an electronic copy of this PDF)
- Photos of O’Brien (available in the “Tim O’Brien, Photos” document – contact Lori Hahn at the UTeach-LA office to request an electronic copy of this PDF)
- Chart paper / chalkboard
- Projector with document camera / computer (preferred, not required)

DAY 1

Engage

5 minutes

As students enter the classroom, photos from O’Brien’s archive will be projected on the screen and students will guess what they are.
**Introduce & Explore**

30 minutes

- Writer’s Notebook / Journal warm-up: What are the things you carry? Why do you carry them? What makes them important to you?
  - Students and teacher will write for 10 minutes.
- Starting with the teacher *(modeling desired outcome)*, everyone in the classroom will share at least one thing from today’s warm-up.
- Class Discussion:
  - What is an archive?
  - What is the purpose of an archive?
  - Define archive using a dictionary or online resource. View Harry Ransom Center’s “About Us” page. [www.hrc.utexas.edu/about/us/](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/about/us/)
  - What are some archives present in your life? *(e.g. social media, google drives)*
- Review annotation as a class:
  - Why do we annotate? How does annotating help readers better comprehend texts?
  - What should you look for when you annotate?

**Explain**

15 minutes

- Teacher will lead a close-reading / think aloud of the first paragraph of the chapter entitled “The Things They Carried.”
  - Students may mark in books or on sticky notes as they follow along.
  - Teacher may call attention repetition, shift from literal to metaphorical burdens, author’s syntax and diction.

**Apply & Elaborate**

30-45 minutes

- Students will imitate the teacher’s example and continue annotating with a partner for 15-20 minutes.
  - Pairs will select two stylistic elements, citing direct textual evidence for each, that they feel are significant and will add them to a class chart. Students will be expected to explain the effect in order to support their choices as “significant.”
  - Teacher will circulate to monitor pair work, scaffolding with guiding questions and offering assistance as needed.

**Evaluate**

15 minutes

- Pairs will present what they’ve selected to the class, making sure to identify the stylistic choice AND effect.

**Closure**

Are the “things” the soldiers carry examples of archives? Explain.

**Homework:** Reread and annotate “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”

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**D A Y 2**

**Engage**

Class discussion: What do you remember from our last class? What did
5-10 minutes
you learn? (Topics may include: archiving, drafts/warm-ups, annotation skills.)

Introduce & Explore
20-25 minutes
• Discuss the difference between revising and editing.
• Distribute copies of revision packet. Review the Ransom Center’s purpose and identify the Ransom Center as the source of O’Brien’s archival materials.
• Examining O’Brien’s Revisions—Group Activity:
  o Break students into groups of 3-4. Students will bring composition books, copies of *The Things They Carried* and revision packets to their groups.
  o In groups, students will read through packets and identify the chapter each passage comes from.
  o Groups will work together to compare the drafts from the archive with the published text: identify 5-10 changes O’Brien made, list them in composition books, and discuss the effect of these changes.
  o Teacher will circulate to monitor group work.
Note: *Teacher should post these instructions on the board/screen or make a handout so that student expectations are clear.*

Apply & Elaborate
30-35 minutes
• Distribute copies of the deleted “The Real Mary Anne” chapter to student groups.
• Groups should read the chapter together and compare it to “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong.”
• Students will answer the following guiding questions in their composition books:
  o How does this change how you think about the “Sweetheart…” chapter?
  o What does O’Brien say about truth and war stories in this deleted chapter?
  o Why do you think O’Brien deleted the chapter?
  o What do O’Brien’s comments about the “context of war” mean?
  o Teacher will circulate to monitor group discussions, scaffolding with supporting questions and offering clarification as needed.
• Each group will identify 2-3 specific and significant things learned from O’Brien’s archive.

Evaluate
10-15 minutes
One person from each group will share 2-3 significant learnings from the day’s activities with the whole class.

Closure
Exit Ticket: How can you imitate O’Brien’s revision process in your own writing? Identify specific strategies you will use to revise.
DAY 3
Engage
~5 minutes
Show students archival material.

Introduce & Explore
30 minutes
Jigsaw Activity—

- Students work in small groups. Each “expert” group explores an item from O’Brien’s archive. Examples of items for the jigsaw include:
  - Letter from Tim’s mother while he was at Basic
  - Fan Letter (“I believe it. All of it.”)
  - Veteran Letter (writing is catharsis)
  - Harvard Resignation Letter
  - “A Soldier Can’t Die Forever,” short story from junior high
  - Lorna Lou Moeller
  - Letter from Tim to home while in Vietnam (“Enough war to last me till the apocalypse”)

Note: Some letters include contact information. Please cover names/addresses before photocopying materials for students.

Explain
15 minutes
- Continue working with in “Expert” groups to discuss and answer questions below in composition books.
  - Where, when, and why was this document written? By whom? Who is the audience?
  - What is the tone of this document?
  - What did you notice about the visual presentation of the document? Was it handwritten? Was it stained? Was it worn? Was it well-preserved?
  - How does this enhance your understanding of the book? *(Questions developed by Dr. Elon Lang, UT Austin.)*

Apply/
Elaborate
25 minutes
After “expert” groups have studied their archival material, they will assemble in “home” groups.

- Students will teach partners in their “home” groups about their archival material.
- Students will take notes in composition books.

Students revisit exit tickets from Day 2 and revise their original 10-minute draft, thinking about the context of their own lives and how that affects the things they carried. Display the following questions *(or something else of a thematic nature)* on the board during this time:

Does your writing express your truth? How can you revise your writing to more truthfully express your context?
Evaluate

10 minutes

Students share their final draft with a partner.

Teacher poses discussion questions:
• Why is the creative process necessary for self-expression?
• How does revision help you to write more truthfully?
• Why do people try to write truthfully? (We want our legacy to represent who we truly are!)

Closure

5 minutes

Exit Ticket: What is the most important thing you learned about the writing process from the last 3 days?

➢ Students turn in exit tickets, final drafts, and composition books.

Future Lessons

• Students write a literary analysis paper that discusses the connection between a stylistic choice (repetition, metaphor, motif) and theme. (AP/IB modification)
• Students explore point of view, genre, and bias with a study of Bao Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War* (perspective of a North Vietnamese soldier) and/or “Visions of War, Dreams of Peace” (collection of poems by nurses who served in Vietnam).
• Students discuss rhetorical uses of the word “war” and research a conflict or war that they want to learn more about. (AP Language modification)
• Write a letter to Tim O’Brien that embeds favorite quotations, and asks at least two specific questions. (Works with any grade level. If a teacher only has time to study the chapter “The Things They Carried” because students have not read the whole book, this may be a good assessment.)
• Research popular music of the time and write thematic statements that connect *The Things They Carried* with the song choice.
• Discuss and write about how “truth” is explored or achieved in different genres.
• Participate in a Socratic Seminar on *The Things They Carried*. Take notes and reflect on how the class discussion enhanced understanding.
• Students study poetry from the time period.

Resources: