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The Truth behind the Story

How do you classify what is really a story? Do we look at the content, or do we look at how it relates to real life. A story is a narrative, usually (but not always) fictional, centering on a major character, and rendering a complete action. Saying that a book is not a story because it is too detailed and realistic is a false statement due to the definition of a story. The assertion that “The Things They Carried” is not a story is wrong. Narrative, character, plot, point of view, idea, and description all determine whether it is a story or not.

In Tim O’Brien’s, “The Things They Carried,” the short story reminisces back to events of the Vietnam War. “The Things They Carried” can be labeled as a story due to the definition of a narrative which determines what a story is. A narrative is the relating or recounting of a sequence of events or actions. A narration may be historical. “The Things They Carried” is historical, because it is based off the Vietnam War. O’Brien’s work is also considered a story because it recounts a sequence of events and actions that happened throughout a portion of the Vietnam War.

“The Things They Carried” is centered on the character Lieutenant Jimmy Cross. A character is an extended verbal representation of a human being, the inner self that determines thought, speech, and behavior. Jimmy Cross represents a young kid in his early 20’s at war. Jimmy acts as a normal human being would by loving someone and having emotions like anyone else. Since Jimmy is our major character in “The Things They Carried,” it can be labeled as a story.

O’Brien’s short story has conflict because of war and then responses from the characters. The plot is the plan or groundwork for a story or a play, with the actions resulting from believable and authentic human responses to a conflict. In “The Things They Carried” one of Lieutenant Jimmy Cross’s friends, Ted Lavender, was killed in the line of duty. Jimmy responds to this loss by crying and letting out his emotions. Jimmy’s response to this loss is believable and authentic which follows the definition of plot. Since “The Things They Carried” has a plot, it is therefore a story.

“The Things They Carried” is told by an outside person. The point of view is the speaker, voice, narrator, or persona of a work; the position from which details are perceived a related; a centralizing mind or intelligence. O’Brien’s work is not told by a character in the book, but someone is narrating the story which is third person point of view. The fact that “The Things They Carried” has a narrator is why O’Brien’s work can correctly be labeled as a story.

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross has an idea that he is to blame for Ted Lavender’s death. An idea is a concept, thought, opinion, or belief. Lieutenant Cross was thinking about Martha when Lavender was killed. Since he was not paying attention to the world and actions around him, he blamed himself for Lavender dying because Ted was his responsibility. “Lavender was dead. You couldn’t burn the blame” (97). Because Cross has this belief of blame, “The Things They Carried” can be considered a story.

Throughout “The Things They Carried” the descriptions of how the soldiers were feeling was displayed- especially Lieutenant Cross. Description is the exposition of scenes, actions, attitudes, and feelings. The narrator displayed Jimmy Cross’s feelings vividly about Martha.

“And even now, without photographs, Lieutenant Cross could see Martha playing volleyball in her white gym shorts and yellow T-shirt. He could see her moving in the rain” (97). Jimmy’s feelings about Martha were so strong that he could imagine and see her without even looking at a photo of her. O’Brien describes the feelings of cross using vivid description which is another reason why “The Things They Carried” is a story.

“The Things They Carried” has examples of narrative, character, plot, point of view, idea, and description which is why it is known as a story. The definition of a story does not depend on whether it is too detailed or too realistic; a story is based off the following elements listed and explained above.

Works Cited

O'Brien, Tim. "The Things They Carried." *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing.* By Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2007. 87-98. Print.

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