

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION: MOCK EXAM
SECTION II

Question 1

(Suggested time-- 40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Background:

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a well-respected novel about the Vietnam War. While much of the book is about the war itself, it is equally about the craft writing. There is some question about whether TTTC is true; in fact, O'Brien says "Almost everything [in the book] is invented" but that "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." In addition to the question of whether his work was a work of fiction or fact, there are other classification problems. **O'Brien says at one point, referring to two different pieces of his own writing: "Going After Cacciato was a war story; "Speaking of Courage" was a postwar story. Two different time periods, two different sets of issues."** Further, O'Brien insists, "I did not look on my work as therapy, and still don't." The novel's unclear status between truth and fiction and between re-living and recovering from the war leaves many readers feeling uncomfortable.

Prompt:

Carefully read the following 6 sources, including the introductory material for each source. Then synthesize information from at least 3 sources and incorporate it into an essay that argues **a clear position about whether Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a war story, a post-war story, or neither.**

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc, or by using the descriptions in parentheses below.

- Source A (McGuire)
- Source B (Ackerman)
- Source C (PTSD)
- Source D (Puiu)
- Source E (Barron)
- Source F (cartoon)

Source A

McGuire, Matt. "When the war is over, literature can help us make sense of it all." *The Conversation*. 5
October 2014

The following is excerpted from an academic journal article.

How can literary texts help understand the complexities of transitional justice and difficulties of social reconciliation? Can literature contribute to peacebuilding, helping us learn lessons from these "new" conflicts in the modern era? Could a work of fiction constitute a truth commission in its own right, a way of both remembering the past and of forgetting it and moving on?

Post-Conflict Literature is part of an emerging field in the discipline of literary studies. It entails a self-conscious examination of literature, and the discipline of literary studies, considering the ability of both to interrogate and explore the legacies of political conflict around the world. Underpinning this new subject is a belief that the value of literature has something to do with the way it helps us understand the world. Works of post-conflict literature can offer insights into our social wellbeing, insights that are rooted in, rather than at odds with, literature's distinctive uses and configurations of language.

First, while there is an expansive scholarship devoted to war writing, less attention has been paid to the ways in which writers approach the legacy and aftermath of political conflict.

Second, the last 20 years have seen the emergence of a new academic sub-discipline, Peace and Conflict Studies. The subject draws on sociology, political science and legal studies, but proponents have not paid much attention to date to the important role that literature can play in mapping this terrain.

What Peace and Conflict Studies has done is introduce a new theoretical vocabulary, including concepts like truth and reconciliation, post-traumatic memory, historical reckoning and therapeutic storytelling. Literary texts provide a form of deep and protracted engagement with the complex and difficult nature of coming to terms with the traumatic past.

We must be cautious of offering easy aesthetic remedies for experiences that are both harrowing and deeply traumatic; but literature is a tool that can help us think through and make sense of the moral complexities that define post-conflict societies.

Wars have changed since the early 20th century – and so has the literature of war. The study of post conflict literature takes these changes seriously – and provides us with insight about how literature shapes our understanding of the world before and after conflict.

Source B

Ackerman, Courtney. "Writing Therapy: Using A Pen and Paper to Enhance Personal Growth." *Positive Psychology Program*. 2017. Web.

The following is from a website that offers information and advice about psychological issues.

Keeping a journal can be extremely helpful for the user, whether it helps them improve their memory, record important bits and pieces of their day, or just helps them relax at the end of a long day. These are certainly not trivial benefits, but the potential benefits of writing therapy reach further and deeper than simply writing in a diary.

In individuals who have experienced a traumatic or extremely stressful event, expressive writing can have a significant healing effect. In fact, participants in a study who wrote about their most traumatic experiences for 15 minutes, four days in a row, experienced better health outcomes up to four months later (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).

Another study tested the same writing exercise on over 100 asthma and rheumatoid arthritis patients, with similar results. The participants who wrote about the most stressful event of their lives experienced better health evaluations related to their illness (Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999).

A recent study suggested that expressive writing may even improve immune system functioning, although it may need to be sustained for the health benefits to continue (Murray, 2002).

In addition to these more concrete benefits, regular therapeutic writing can help the writer find meaning in their experiences, view things from a new perspective, and see the silver linings in their most stressful or negative experiences (Murray, 2002). It can also lead to important insights about yourself and your environment that may be difficult to determine without focused writing (Tartakovsky, 2015).

Overall, writing therapy has proven effective for many different conditions or mental illnesses, including:

- Post-traumatic stress
- Anxiety or Depression
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Chronic illness issues
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Interpersonal relationship issues
- Communication skill issues
- Low self-esteem

Source C

“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).” *War Related Illness and Injury Study Center*. US Department of Veteran’s Affairs. 2018.

The following is from a government website that gives information to veterans.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is an anxiety disorder that may occur after an individual has experienced a traumatic event. Symptoms include:

- Nightmares
- Reliving the experience
- Hypervigilance
- Feeling distant from friends and family

5% of men and 10% of women will experience PTSD at some point in their life. In contrast, 30% of Vietnam Veterans, 10% of Gulf War Veterans, and 15% of OEF and OIF Veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD.

Veterans who experience a traumatic event (i.e., combat, physical assault, serious accident) may have initial feelings of fear, anger and confusion. For many people, these symptoms resolve within weeks or months.

PTSD is diagnosed when these feelings do not subside, or they get worse. It is important to get treatment for these symptoms because they may lead to drinking and drug use, trouble sleeping, irritability, and angry outbursts. Eventually, PTSD may interfere with work, family relationships, and social life.

Source D

Puiu, Tibi. "In the face of Adversity and War, Bonds among Soldiers are as Strong as Kinship." *ZME Science Newsletter*. Web. 2014.

The following is taken from a science newsletter publication that publishes about recent research studies.

It's no surprise for anyone to find that soldiers fighting together on the front-line are tied together by a special relationship. They have to be. Soldiers need to know they can wholeheartedly depend on each other, put faith in the other's ability. It's not just about survival. It's about comfort; knowing there's someone close to you that can perfectly relate to the hell you're going through. You'll often hear warring bands of brothers speak of their unit as a "family", but how deep or intense is this link? A study made by researchers who joined front-line warriors during the Lybian 2011 revolution suggests that the bonds soldiers formed in times of great adversity were as strong as those they had with their own kin, literally.

Scientists have always been puzzled by soldiery bonds. What makes most fighters from the same side ready themselves to make the ultimate sacrifice for a person with which they do not share close genetic makeup. Family members will do anything for one another, but their actions are supported by evolutionary considerations: they need to maximize their chances of preserving and passing on their characteristic genetic makeup.

Researchers took part in the "Ritual, Community, and Conflict" project – an initiative made up of anthropologists, psychologists, historians, archaeologists and evolutionary theorists working together to try to understand the forces that bind and drive human groups. One researcher, Brian McQuinn, saw first hand how groups of three to five fighters swelled in numbers until they developed into large revolutionary groups, whose members would all pray, sleep and fight side by side. He surveyed participants, measuring the participants' identity fusion (how much they identified with their group). Each Lybian was asked to choose from a series of pictures that represented different degrees of overlap between themselves and three groups: their families, their battalions and other battalions. The results for the front-line soldiers show that 99% of them believed they were "fused" with their own families, but amazingly 97% indicated fusion with their own battalions, and 96% with fighters in other battalions.

When they were asked which of the groups they were most connected with, nearly half (45%) of front-line fighters chose their own battalion rather than their family. By contrast, only 28% of non-fighters chose battalion over family. Interestingly, hardly anyone surveyed (only 1%) were fused with ordinary Libyans who supported the revolution but did not join the battalions.

There are already a number of studies that look at how cohesion in the military affects group performance, but very little research has looked at how intense bonds like these are formed – how bonding with the group can lead individuals to place themselves in harm's way and sacrifice their lives for other group members.

Source E

Barron, Jeff. "In Lancaster for reunion, Vietnam platoon members still haunted by the war." *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette*. Print. 2018.

The following is from a local newspaper from a small town.

The Vietnam War ended more than 40 years ago. Yet the pain of war still lingers for some veterans, and the memories are still difficult for some to talk about.

"Yes, sir," Jerry Juilfs said. "Yes, they are still. It's touching." He was speaking with fellow veteran Bill Hartman after a tour of the Sherman House Museum Tuesday. Both men broke into tears when talking.

Juilfs, from Illinois and Hartman, from Wisconsin, were among five Vietnam veterans who are spending the week in Fairfield County. The others are Sugar Grove resident Ric Hurst, Terry Ackman, from St. Louis and Lamont Meaux, from Texas. They have met annually for about 15 years all across the country, including Texas, Colorado, Wisconsin and New Mexico.

The men were in the Army's 199th Light Infantry Group Charlie Company 412 1st Platoon in Vietnam from January 1969 to January 1970, with Hurst serving as a combat medic.

"It is very emotional," Juilfs said of the annual reunions. "We kind of sit around for a while, then we talk about some of the Vietnam experiences. We don't do it a long time because it brings back a lot of memories. It was a sad time because we were in a combat unit over there and we served in combat the whole time for one year."

The men and their families toured downtown museums Tuesday before lunch, they were set to visit some county parks in the afternoon. They are scheduled to visit Mott's Military Museum in Groveport and the Hocking Hills area later this week.

Like Juilfs, Hurst said the reunions are emotional. "Every year it seems like we remember something different," he said. "Only because we can't talk about it with anyone else." Hurst, who recently retired after 30 years from Fairfield Medical Center's x-ray department, said the men stay in touch all year, with some talking to each other once a month.

The men met in Lancaster after Hurst asked Lancaster-Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce President Travis Markwood if the chamber could help with the reunion. "I knew that we had an opportunity here to not only show off our community since they do travel throughout the United States but more importantly, I really felt like we as a community had a true opportunity to thank those gentlemen for their service and sacrifices," Markwood said. "It's a pretty unique story to have guys getting together like that after all those years. Especially, through such an experience as the Vietnam War. I hope that they see this as just a little bit of gratitude for what they've done and enjoy their day here in our community."

Source F

Zyglis, Adam. "VA Waiting Room." *The Buffalo News*. Print. 2014.

The following is a political cartoon from 2014.

