

Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?

Short Story by Tim O'Brien

Tim O'Brien: The Naked Soldier

Interview from *Verbicide Magazine*

Be a Marine

Recruitment Poster



Video link at
thinkcentral.com

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML9-826

Is **FEAR** our worst enemy?

COMMON CORE

RL 4 Determine the figurative meaning of words and phrases and analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

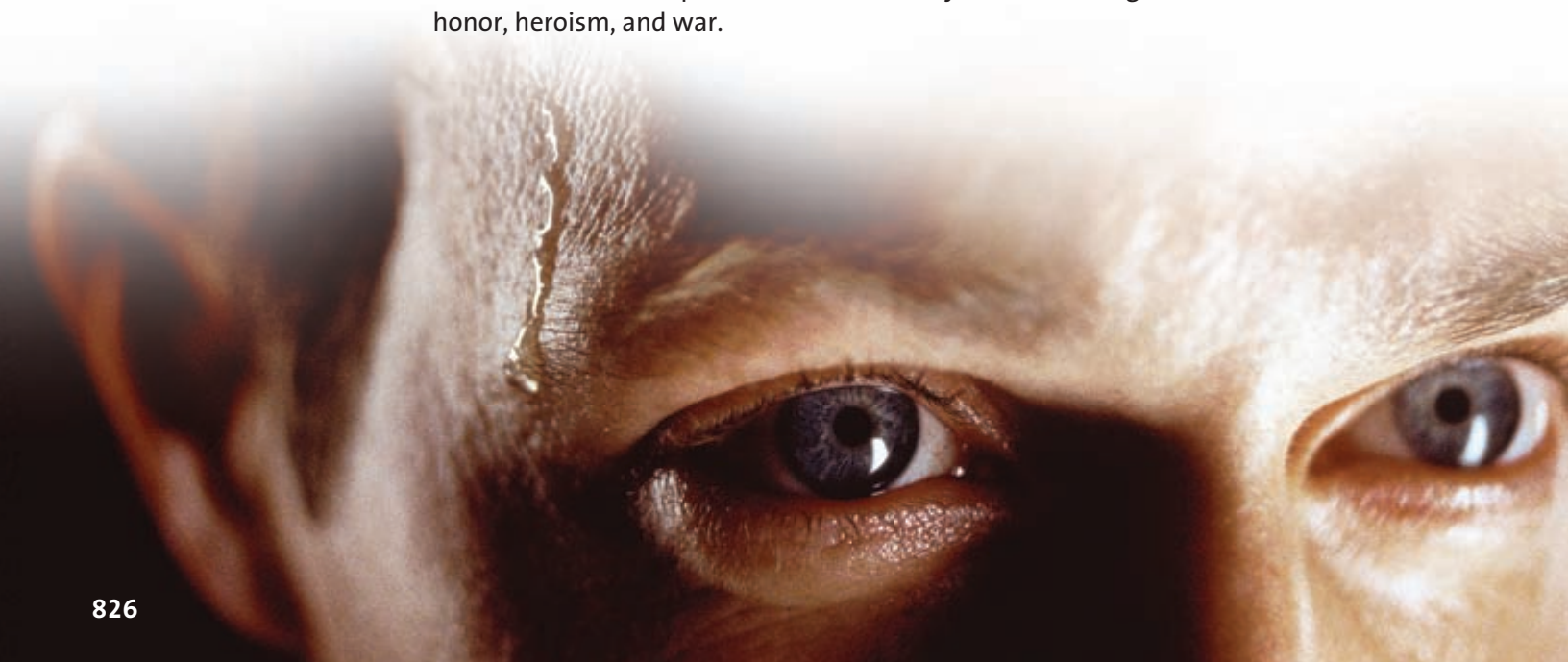
RL 5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to order events and manipulate time create mystery, tension, or surprise.

L 3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts and to comprehend more fully.

Your heart pounds. Your hands shake. Your stomach churns. Adrenaline floods your body. You are gripped by fear, and the way you react to it is as unique as your fingerprints. In "Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?" a young soldier struggling through his first night in Vietnam tries desperately to combat his growing terror.

What's the Connection?

Experiencing the tragedies of war can frighten and permanently scar even the bravest of soldiers, so why do people go to war? Is it heroic to fight despite fear? After reading the following short story, you'll read an interview and view a poster that each convey certain messages about honor, heroism, and war.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: REALISM

You know that just as you and your friends have a style all your own, so do writers. A writer's style is the unique way he or she communicates ideas. This style is reflected in the dialogue, word choice, and sentence structure of every piece of writing. In this story, Tim O'Brien uses the style of **realism** to depict the horrors of combat as seen through the eyes of a young soldier. To make the story seem real to the reader, he uses

- dialogue that sounds natural, like actual speech
- vivid, realistic descriptions of what the soldier sees
- a mix of long and short sentences to communicate the soldier's thoughts and feelings

As you read, think about the way the characters talk to each other, and consider O'Brien's word choice and sentence structure. Note passages that seem particularly realistic to you.

Review: Point of View

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE SEQUENCE

The sequence of a story is the order in which events occur. Sometimes a writer interrupts this linear order with a **flashback**, an account of an event that happened before the beginning of the story's action. A flashback provides more background information about the current situation and helps the reader understand the story's events. To identify a flashback, look for sudden changes in scene. As you read this story, note how its flashbacks help create a tense and frightening mood. Keep track of the story's order of events by filling in a sequence chain like the one shown.



▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

In your *Reader/Writer Notebook*, try to restate each phrase, using a different word or words for the boldfaced term.

1. a secret mission depending on **stealth**
2. huge stalks of corn in the rich, **fecund** field
3. an argument too **diffuse** to understand
4. lying around in a state of **inertia**



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Tim O'Brien

born 1946

From Dull to Dangerous

"If you look in a dictionary under the word *boring*," Tim O'Brien says sarcastically, "you will find a little pen-and-ink illustration of Worthington, Minnesota, where I grew up." As a kid, O'Brien escaped from the quiet predictability of his hometown by burying himself in books. Just after he graduated from a small Minnesota college, O'Brien's life got more exciting—but not in a way he ever would have chosen. He was drafted and sent to Vietnam.

Combat Zone

O'Brien was strongly opposed to the Vietnam War and considered fleeing to Canada to avoid serving in the army. He knew, however, that failing to enlist would make him an outcast in his hometown. "That's a tough thing to do when you're that old," O'Brien says, "to decide to walk away from your whole history." He was shipped to Vietnam in 1969, and though some of his experiences there were gruesome, they inspired him to write. In 1973, O'Brien published his first book, an account of his time in Vietnam. The war has been the main subject of his writing ever since.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Vietnam War

This story takes place in the Southeast Asian country of Vietnam during a war in which over 58,000 Americans died. Rebels backed by Communist-ruled North Vietnam tried to take over South Vietnam in 1957. The U.S. entered the war as a South Vietnamese ally in 1964. Between 1965 and 1973, over 2 million Americans were sent to Vietnam. Few were prepared for the fear and anxiety that would overcome them.

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Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?

Tim O'Brien

The platoon of twenty-six soldiers moved slowly in the dark, single file, not talking.

One by one, like sheep in a dream, they passed through the hedgerow, crossed quietly over a meadow and came down to the rice paddy.¹ There they stopped. Their leader knelt down, motioning with his hand, and one by one the other soldiers squatted in the shadows, vanishing in the primitive **stealth** of warfare. For a long time they did not move. Except for the sounds of their breathing, . . . the twenty-six men were very quiet: some of them excited by the adventure, some of them afraid, some of them exhausted from the long night march, some of them looking forward to reaching the sea where they would be safe. At the rear of the column, Private First Class Paul Berlin lay quietly with his forehead resting on the black plastic stock of his rifle, his eyes closed. He was pretending he was not in the war, pretending he had not watched Billy Boy Watkins die of a heart attack that afternoon. He was pretending he was a boy again, camping with his father in the midnight summer along the Des Moines River. In the dark, with his eyes pinched shut, he pretended. He pretended that when he opened his eyes, his father would be there by the campfire and they would talk softly about whatever came to mind and then roll into their sleeping bags, and that later they'd wake up and it would be morning and there would not be a war, and that Billy Boy Watkins had not died of a heart attack that afternoon. He pretended he was not a soldier. **A**

Analyze Visuals ▶

Would you describe this painting as **realistic** or **abstract**? Cite details about the painting's subject, setting, and mood, as well as the artist's use of light and color.

stealth (stēlth) *n.* cautious or secret action or movement

A REALISM

Reread lines 11–21, and consider O'Brien's use of both long and short sentences to convey Paul Berlin's thoughts. What effect does this stylistic choice create?

1. **hedgerow . . . rice paddy:** A hedgerow is a thick hedge separating fields or farms; a rice paddy is a flooded field in which rice is grown.



In the morning, when they reached the sea, it would be better. The hot afternoon would be over, he would bathe in the sea and he would forget how frightened he had been on his first day at the war. The second day would not be so bad. He would learn.

There was a sound beside him, a movement and then a breathed: “Hey!”

He opened his eyes, shivering as if emerging from a deep nightmare.

“Hey!” a shadow whispered. “We’re *moving*. . . . Get up.”

“Okay.”

30 “You sleepin’, or something?”

“No.” He could not make out the soldier’s face. With clumsy, concrete hands he clawed for his rifle, found it, found his helmet.

The soldier-shadow grunted. “You got a lot to learn, buddy. I’d shoot you if I thought you was sleepin’. Let’s go.” **B**

Private First Class Paul Berlin blinked.

Ahead of him, silhouetted against the sky, he saw the string of soldiers wading into the flat paddy, the black outline of their shoulders and packs and weapons. He was comfortable. He did not want to move. But he was afraid, for it was his first night at the war, so he hurried to catch up, stumbling once, 40 scraping his knee, groping as though blind; his boots sank into the thick paddy water and he smelled it all around him. He would tell his mother how it smelled: mud and algae and cattle manure and chlorophyll, decay, breeding mosquitoes and leeches as big as mice, the **fecund** warmth of the paddy waters rising up to his cut knee. But he would not tell how frightened he had been.

Once they reached the sea, things would be better. They would have their rear guarded by three thousand miles of ocean, and they would swim and dive into the breakers and hunt crayfish and smell the salt, and they would be safe.

He followed the shadow of the man in front of him. It was a clear night.

Already the Southern Cross² was out. And other stars he could not yet name— 50 soon, he thought, he would learn their names. And puffy night clouds. There was not yet a moon. Wading through the paddy, his boots made sleepy, sloshing sounds, like a lullaby, and he tried not to think. Though he was afraid, he now knew that fear came in many degrees and types and peculiar categories, and he knew that his fear now was not so bad as it had been in the hot afternoon, when poor Billy Boy Watkins got killed by a heart attack. His fear now was **diffuse** and unformed: ghosts in the tree line, nighttime fears of a child, a boogiemán in the closet that his father would open to show empty, saying “See? Nothing there, champ. Now you can sleep.” In the afternoon it had been worse: the fear had been bundled and tight and he’d been on his hands and knees, crawling like an insect, 60 an ant escaping a giant’s footsteps and thinking nothing, brain flopping like wet cement in a mixer, not thinking at all, watching while Billy Boy Watkins died.

Now as he stepped out of the paddy onto a narrow dirt path, now the fear was mostly the fear of being so terribly afraid again.

He tried not to think.

B REALISM

Reread lines 26–34. What specific features of the characters’ speech make this **dialogue** sound realistic? Explain, citing evidence to support your answer.

fecund (fē’kənd) *adj.*
producing much
growth; fertile

diffuse (dī’fyoōs’) *adj.*
unfocused

2. **Southern Cross:** a cross-shaped group of stars visible in the Southern Hemisphere.

There were tricks he'd learned to keep from thinking. Counting: He counted his steps, concentrating on the numbers, pretending that the steps were dollar bills and that each step through the night made him richer and richer, so that soon he would become a wealthy man, and he kept counting and considered the ways he might spend the money after the war and what he would do. He
 70 would look his father in the eye and shrug and say, "It was pretty bad at first, but I learned a lot and I got used to it." Then he would tell his father the story of Billy Boy Watkins. But he would never let on how frightened he had been. "Not so bad," he would say instead, making his father feel proud. **C**

Songs, another trick to stop from thinking: *Where have you gone, Billy Boy, Billy Boy, Oh, where have you gone, charming Billy? I have gone to seek a wife, she's the joy of my life, but she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother*, and other songs that he sang in his thoughts as he walked toward the sea. And when he reached the sea he would dig a deep hole in the sand and he would sleep like the high clouds, and he would not be afraid any more.

80 The moon came out. Pale and shrunken to the size of a dime.

The helmet was heavy on his head. In the morning he would adjust the leather binding. He would clean his rifle, too. Even though he had been frightened to shoot it during the hot afternoon, he would carefully clean the breech and the muzzle and the ammunition so that next time he would be ready and not so afraid. In the morning, when they reached the sea, he would begin to make friends with some of the other soldiers. He would learn their names and laugh at their jokes. Then when the war was over he would have war buddies, and he would write to them once in a while and exchange memories. **D**

Walking, sleeping in his walking, he felt better. He watched the moon
 90 come higher.

Once they skirted a sleeping village. The smells again—straw, cattle, mildew. The men were quiet. On the far side of the village, buried in the dark smells, a dog barked. The column stopped until the barking died away; then they marched fast away from the village, through a graveyard filled with conical-shaped burial mounds and tiny altars made of clay and stone. The graveyard had a perfumy smell. A nice place to spend the night, he thought. The mounds would make fine battlements, and the smell was nice and the place was quiet. But they went on, passing through a hedgerow and across another paddy and east toward the sea. **E**

He walked carefully. He remembered what he'd been taught: Stay off the
 100 center of the path, for that was where the land mines and booby traps were planted, where stupid and lazy soldiers like to walk. Stay alert, he'd been taught. Better alert than inert. Ag-ile, mo-bile, hos-tile.³ He wished he'd paid better attention to the training. He could not remember what they'd said about how to stop being afraid; they hadn't given any lessons in courage—not that he could remember—and they hadn't mentioned how Billy Boy Watkins would die of a heart attack, his face turning pale and the veins popping out.

C SEQUENCE

Summarize the story's events up to this point. Which events take place in Vietnam? Which are scenes the narrator imagines will happen in the future or remembers from his past?

D GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 81–88. Notice O'Brien's repetition of "he would," which reflects Paul's way of coping with his current situation.

E REALISM

Reread lines 91–98. Identify the **sensory details**—details that appeal to the five senses—O'Brien includes. How do these details contribute to the vivid, realistic style of this story?

3. **Better alert . . . hos-tile:** sayings and chants reminding soldiers to pay attention rather than be lifeless (inert), and to be light on their feet (agile), ready to move (mobile), and aggressive (hostile).

Private First Class Paul Berlin walked carefully.

Stretching ahead of him like dark beads on an invisible chain, the string of shadow-soldiers whose names he did not yet know moved with the silence and
110 slow grace of smoke. Now and again moonlight was reflected off a machine gun or a wrist watch. But mostly the soldiers were quiet and hidden and far-away-seeming in a peaceful night, strangers on a long street, and he felt quite separate from them, as if trailing behind like the caboose on a night train, pulled along by **inertia**, sleepwalking, an afterthought to the war.

inertia (ĭ-nûr'shə) *n.*
tendency to continue to do what one has been doing

So he walked carefully, counting his steps. When he had counted to three thousand, four hundred and eighty-five, the column stopped.

One by one the soldiers knelt or squatted down.

The grass along the path was wet. Private First Class Paul Berlin lay back and turned his head so that he could lick at the dew with his eyes closed,
120 another trick to forget the war. He might have slept. “I *wasn't* afraid,” he was screaming or dreaming, facing his father’s stern eyes. “I wasn’t afraid,” he was saying. When he opened his eyes, a soldier was sitting beside him, quietly chewing a stick of Doublemint gum. **F**

“You sleepin’ again?” the soldier whispered.

“No,” said Private First Class Paul Berlin. . . .

The soldier grunted, chewing his gum. Then he twisted the cap off his canteen, took a swallow and handed it through the dark.

“Take some,” he whispered.

“Thanks.”

130 “You’re the new guy?”

“Yes.” He did not want to admit it, being new to the war.

The soldier grunted and handed him a stick of gum. “Chew it quiet—okay? Don’t blow no bubbles or nothing.”

“Thanks. I won’t.” He could not make out the man’s face in the shadows.

They sat still and Private First Class Paul Berlin chewed the gum until all the sugars were gone; then the soldier said, “Bad day today, buddy.”

Private First Class Paul Berlin nodded wisely, but he did not speak.

“Don’t think it’s always so bad,” the soldier whispered. “I don’t wanna scare you. You’ll get used to it soon enough. . . . They been fighting wars a long
140 time, and you get used to it.”

“Yeah.”

“You will.”

They were quiet awhile. And the night was quiet, no crickets or birds, and it was hard to imagine it was truly a war. He searched for the soldier’s face but could not find it. It did not matter much. Even if he saw the fellow’s face, he would not know the name; and even if he knew the name, it would not matter much.

“Haven’t got the time?” the soldier whispered.

“No.”

“Rats. . . . Don’t matter, really. Goes faster if you don’t know the time,
150 anyhow.”

“Sure.”

F POINT OF VIEW

Identify the point of view from which this story is told. How might your impression of Paul be different if you didn’t receive such detailed descriptions of his thoughts and feelings?

“What’s your name, buddy?”

“Paul.”

“Nice to meet ya,” he said, and in the dark beside the path they shook hands. “Mine’s Toby. Everybody calls me Buffalo, though.” The soldier’s hand was strangely warm and soft. But it was a very big hand. “Sometimes they just call me Buff,” he said.

And again they were quiet. They lay in the grass and waited. The moon was very high now and very bright, and they were waiting for cloud cover.

160 The soldier suddenly snorted.

“What is it?”

“Nothin’,” he said, but then he snorted again. “A bloody *heart attack!*” the soldier said. “Can’t get over it—old Billy Boy croaking from a lousy heart attack. . . . A heart attack—can you believe it?”

The idea of it made Private First Class Paul Berlin smile. He couldn’t help it.

“Ever hear of such a thing?”

“Not till now,” said Private First Class Paul Berlin, still smiling.

“Me neither,” said the soldier in the dark.

“ . . . Dying of a heart attack. Didn’t know him, did you.”

170

“No.”

“Tough as nails.”

COMMON CORE RL.4

Language Coach

Slang Many slang words—words used informally with special meanings—have original meanings that relate to animals. When the soldier can’t find out the time, he says, “Rats” (line 149), expressing disappointment. What do you think *croaking* and *lousy* mean in line 163? What are the original meanings of these words?



Class of '67 (1987), Charlie Shobe. Oil on canvas. © Michael Tropea/National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum.

Analyze Visuals

In this painting, the prone soldiers’ boots take up the **foreground**, or front of the painting, while the standing soldiers are relegated to the **background**. What does this suggest about the message of the painting?

“Yeah.”

“And what happens? A heart attack. Can you imagine it?”

“Yes,” said Private First Class Paul Berlin. He wanted to laugh. “I can imagine it.” And he imagined it clearly. He giggled—he couldn’t help it. He imagined Billy’s father opening the telegram: SORRY TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON BILLY BOY WAS YESTERDAY SCARED TO DEATH IN ACTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, VALIANTLY SUCCUMBING TO⁴ A HEART ATTACK SUFFERED WHILE UNDER ENORMOUS STRESS, AND IT IS WITH GREATEST SYMPATHY THAT . . . He giggled again. He rolled onto his belly and pressed his face into his arms. His body was shaking with giggles. **G**

The big soldier hissed at him to shut up, but he could not stop giggling and remembering the hot afternoon, and poor Billy Boy, and how they’d been drinking Coca-Cola from bright-red aluminum cans, and how they’d started on the day’s march, and how a little while later poor Billy Boy stepped on the mine, and how it made a tiny little sound—*poof*—and how Billy Boy stood there with his mouth wide-open, looking down at where his foot had been blown off, and how finally Billy Boy sat down very casually, not saying a word, with his foot lying behind him, most of it still in the boot.

He giggled louder—he could not stop. He bit his arm, trying to stifle it, but remembering: “War’s over, Billy,” the men had said in consolation, but Billy Boy got scared and started crying and said he was about to die. “Nonsense,” the medic said, Doc Peret, but Billy Boy kept bawling, tightening up, his face going pale and transparent and his veins popping out. Scared stiff. Even when Doc Peret stuck him with morphine,⁵ Billy Boy kept crying. **H**

“Shut up!” the big soldier hissed, but Private First Class Paul Berlin could not stop. Giggling and remembering, he covered his mouth. His eyes stung, remembering how it was when Billy Boy died of fright.

“Shut up!”

But he could not stop giggling, the same way Billy Boy could not stop bawling that afternoon.

Afterward Doc Peret had explained: “You see, Billy Boy really died of a heart attack. He was scared he was gonna die—so scared, he had himself a heart attack—and that’s what really killed him. I seen it before.”

So they wrapped Billy in a plastic poncho, his eyes still wide-open and scared stiff, and they carried him over the meadow to a rice paddy, and then when the Medevac helicopter⁶ arrived they carried him through the paddy and put him aboard, and the mortar rounds⁷ were falling everywhere, and the helicopter pulled up and Billy Boy came tumbling out, falling slowly and then faster, and the paddy water sprayed up as if Billy Boy had just executed a long

COMMON CORE L3

G REALISM

The imaginary telegram includes a past-tense verb in the **passive voice**, meaning that the subject *son* receives the action of the verb *was scared*. When a verb is in the **active voice**, the subject performs the action. Although the passive voice should be used sparingly in formal writing, it is realistic here because it emphasizes the person rather than what scared him to death. Why might the writer of a government telegram use the passive voice to emphasize *son*?

H SEQUENCE

Reread lines 183–196. What happens to the story’s order of events in these lines? Identify the clues that helped you form your answer.

4. **valiantly succumbing** (sə-kūm’ɪŋ) **to**: bravely dying from.

5. **morphine** (môr’fēn’): a powerful drug used as a painkiller.

6. **Medevac** (mēd’ī-vāk’) **helicopter**: a helicopter used for transporting injured people to places where they can receive medical care. “Medevac” is a contraction of “medical evacuation.”

7. **mortar rounds**: shells fired from small, portable cannons.

and dangerous dive, as if trying to escape Graves Registration, where he would be tagged and sent home under a flag, dead of a heart attack.

“Shut up, . . . !” the soldier hissed, but Paul Berlin could not stop giggling, remembering: scared to death.

220 Later they waded in after him, probing for Billy Boy with their rifle butts, elegantly and delicately probing for Billy Boy in the stinking paddy, singing—some of them—*Where have you gone, Billy Boy, Billy Boy, Oh, where have you gone, charming Billy?* Then they found him. Green and covered with algae, his eyes still wide-open and scared

230 stiff, dead of a heart attack suffered while— **I**

“Shut up, . . . !” the soldier said loudly, shaking him.

But Private First Class Paul Berlin could not stop. The giggles were caught in his throat, drowning him in his own laughter: scared to death like Billy Boy.

Giggling, lying on his back, he saw the moon move, or the clouds moving across the moon. Wounded in action, dead of fright. A fine war story. He would tell it to his father, how Billy Boy had been scared to death, never letting on . . . He could not stop.

The soldier smothered him. He tried to fight back, but he was weak from the giggles.

240 The moon was under the clouds and the column was moving. The soldier helped him up. “You okay now, buddy?”

“Sure.”

“What was so bloody funny?”

“Nothing.”

“You can get killed, laughing that way.”

“I know. I know that.”

“You got to stay calm, buddy.” The soldier handed him his rifle. “Half the battle, just staying calm. You’ll get better at it,” he said. “Come on, now.”

250 He turned away and Private First Class Paul Berlin hurried after him. He was still shivering.

He would do better once he reached the sea, he thought, still smiling a little. A funny war story that he would tell to his father, how Billy Boy Watkins was scared to death. A good joke. But even when he smelled salt and heard the sea, he could not stop being afraid. **∞**



Chopper Lift-Out (1967), Ken McFadyen. Oil on canvas on hardboard, 30.6 cm × 48.2 cm. © The Australian War Memorial Collection.

I SEQUENCE

What information has been communicated to the reader in this **flashback**? Explain, citing details from the text.

COMMON CORE RL.4

Language Coach

Idioms An **idiom** is an expression whose meaning differs from the literal meaning of the words, taken together, in the expression. In a war story, a military idiom can be confusing. What does *half the battle* mean literally? What do you think it means in lines 247–248?

Interview

In this revealing interview, Tim O'Brien talks about two kinds of bravery and discusses the courage it took to make one frightening choice.

Tim O'Brien: *The Naked Soldier*

Douglas Novielli, Christopher Connal, and Jackson Ellis, *Verbicide Magazine*

Verbicide Do you think you would have pursued writing if you hadn't gone to Vietnam?

O'Brien Probably. It probably would've been something different. If I'd gone to Canada I'd be writing about that. Life provides you plenty of material, with girlfriends or whatever.

V Do you think you romanticize Vietnam at all?

O No. I think a lot of veterans think I haven't done that enough, but I refuse to do it.

V Is there a reason they think it should be romanticized?

O Yeah, they look back on it as more heroic, and with nostalgia, and they talk about the fellowship or fraternity among men, and there's some truth to that. But it's an artificial one; it's borne of necessity. Even if you don't like someone, you've got to trust them at night when they're on guard and you're sleeping. And you learn who to trust and who not to trust, and you bond that way. But I never found it very heroic, I just found it stone-man, gotta stay alive stuff. And that's all there was to it.

V Are soldiers heroes?

O In some ways. It's heroic just not to stop. Physically, there are always alternatives, I mean, just stop walking. What can they do? Court martial you, but they're not gonna kill you. It looks pretty attractive, especially in bad days when guys have been dropping like flies. . . .

You just keep humping. There's a weird heroism in that. Unglamorous kind of valor to just keep going, knowing you might die with every step, and just keep walking.

V Is the heroism there in your books to be interpreted if the reader wants it, or is it directly implied?

O I remember one part in *The Things They Carried* when I was talking about humping and just taking one step after the next, and at one point I called it a kind of courage, which it is, just to keep your legs moving. I'm kind of explicit about that kind of courage, but there are other kinds of courage just like there are kinds of truth. It took a lot of guts, for example, to go to Canada. Your whole hometown is going to think of you as a sissy or a coward, even though it's totally conscientious. So I admire the heroism and courage it took. I didn't have the guts to do it, to cross over the border.

V Do you still regret that?

O Yeah, you can't live your life over, but it would have been the right thing to do. I mean, think how hard it would be, even now it would be hard and I'm grown up. It was the thing that was worse than anything about the war, just going to it. Once you're in the war, it's pretty much what you'd expect. But, boy, making that decision, because you're in control of things. You can go in the army, or you can go to Canada. I never actually made that drive and went to the Rainy River.¹ That's invented. But it did happen in my head all summer long. I thought about driving to Canada.

1. **Rainy River:** a river on the U.S.–Canadian border. In O'Brien's short story "On the Rainy River," the main character drives to the river and considers whether he should cross the border into Canada and dodge the draft.

Comprehension

- 1. Recall** According to Doc Peret, what causes the death of Billy Boy Watkins?
- 2. Clarify** Why does Toby want to keep Paul quiet?
- 3. Summarize** How does the story end?

Text Analysis

- 4. Draw Conclusions** Describe how Paul Berlin tries to combat his fear in this story. How successful is he? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.
- 5. Identify Conflict** Is the main conflict in this story **internal** or **external**? Explain, citing details from the text to support your answer.
- 6. Analyze Sequence** Review the chart you made as you read, and think about the **flashback** in lines 183–196, in which Paul recalls the death of Billy Boy Watkins in vivid detail. Why might O’Brien have used the flashback at this point in the story? What did it help you, the reader, understand?

- 7. Analyze Realism** Find examples in the text that illustrate each element of **style** shown on the chart. Use your completed chart to explain how O’Brien’s use of realism contributes to the reader’s perceptions of Paul and his situation.

<i>Element of Style</i>	<i>Examples from Text</i>
<i>Realistic dialogue</i>	
<i>Description featuring sensory details</i>	
<i>Passages made up of both long and short sentences</i>	
<i>Use of flashback</i>	

- 8. Synthesize** In “The Naked Soldier” on page 836, O’Brien talks about two different kinds of courage—the courage it took to serve in Vietnam and the courage it took to defy the draft and flee to Canada. In your opinion, which act was more courageous? Use evidence from both the story and the interview to support your opinion.

Text Criticism

- 9. Author’s Style** In describing what he strives for when creating stories, O’Brien states, “You aim for tension and suspense, a sense of drama, displaying in concrete terms the actions and reactions of human beings contesting problems of the heart.” How successfully does O’Brien fulfill the above criteria in this story? Cite evidence from the story to support your opinion.

Is FEAR our worst enemy?

How are some reactions to fear negative? How are some positive?

COMMON CORE

RL 4 Determine the figurative meaning of words and phrases and analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RL 5** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to order events and manipulate time create mystery, tension, or surprise. **L 3** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts and to comprehend more fully.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Write the word from the Word List that best completes each sentence.

1. The soldiers moved with _____ across the countryside so that they would not be spotted by the enemy.
2. In spite of all the bombing it had suffered, the land they traveled through was still _____.
3. In their nervousness, it was hard to bring their _____ thoughts back into clear focus.
4. They relied on _____ and force of habit to keep them on the path.

WORD LIST

diffuse
fecund
inertia
stealth

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

- appreciate
- attribute
- indicate
- unique
- vary

What are the **attributes** of a hero? Prepare a brief instructional presentation in which you **indicate** what makes someone a hero and describe what tasks a regular person can accomplish to become an “everyday hero” (for example, helping to solve problems in the community). Be sure to solicit questions from your audience and provide thoughtful answers, and use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your presentation.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORDS THAT START WITH *in-*

The forms of certain words beginning with *in-* can sometimes cause confusion. When you see a word like *inertia*, for example, in which *in-* means “unable to” or “not,” you might make the assumption that you can remove the prefix to form a word with an opposite, “positive” meaning. However, there is no such English word as *ertia*. To avoid writing incorrect antonyms for words with *in-*, you can look up the word’s definition and etymology, or origin, in a dictionary and also check whether the word exists without the prefix.

PRACTICE Create a two-column chart with these headings: “No Positive Form” and “Positive Form Not Often Used.” Use a dictionary to place each word in the correct column. Then write a brief definition of each word.

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. incorrigible | 5. insuperable |
| 2. inclement | 6. insipid |
| 3. insomnia | 7. incognito |
| 4. indolent | 8. incongruous |

COMMON CORE

L4c Consult reference materials to determine a word’s meaning or etymology.

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KEYWORD: HML9-838

Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Add Supporting Details

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 831. O'Brien depicts Paul as a frightened and inexperienced soldier by using details to provide a window into Paul's mental state. The **repetition** that marks Paul's thoughts reflects his continuing fear, anxiety, and denial. Here is an example from the story. Note that O'Brien repeats the verb *pretending*:

He was pretending he was not in the war, pretending he had not watched Billy Boy Watkins die of a heart attack that afternoon. He was pretending he was a boy again, camping with his father in the midnight summer along the Des Moines River. (lines 12–16)

Study the student model. Notice how the revisions in blue use repetition to reflect Paul's feelings of denial and anxiety. Revise your response to the prompt below by using similar techniques.

STUDENT MODEL

I'm exhausted and hungry, but I'm not afraid. Don't worry about me,

Dad, I know I'll be home soon. *—I don't worry about me.*
I'll be home sooner than you think.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Demonstrate your knowledge of “Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Short Constructed Response: Letter

Think about Paul Berlin's deep desire to please his father and the fear he grapples with in this story. Using details from the text, pretend you are Paul and handwrite a **one- or two-paragraph letter** home. Describe your experiences as a soldier, and be sure to write the letter legibly so that it can be easily read and understood.

REVISING TIP

Review your letter.

Does it sound realistic? It should seem as if it were written by Paul, on the basis of the traits he exhibits in the story.

▶ Add some instances of repetition to emphasize Paul's feelings of anxiety—and his desire to hide them. Handwrite the letter again to include your revisions.

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Recruitment Poster

The short story and the interview you just read both deal with the Vietnam War—a long and bloody conflict that divided the American people. While some Americans thought the United States should participate in the war, others opposed U.S. involvement and protested for peace. The poster below was designed to recruit new Marines during World War II. Even though far more Americans lost their lives in World War II than in Vietnam, the war effort was widely supported on the home front.



COMMON CORE

RL 7 Analyze the representation of a subject in two different artistic mediums.

1. DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Consider the image of the Marine on the poster. Whom is this poster intended to recruit? How could a new recruit both “be a Marine” and “free a Marine to fight”?

2. ANALYZE DETAILS

Study the Marine’s facial expression, posture, and overall appearance. How would you describe her?

3. INFER

During World War II, posters like this one urged Americans to support the war in various ways. How effective do you think the posters were? What else might have accounted for public support for the war? Explain your thoughts.

Assessment Practice: Short Constructed Response

LITERARY TEXT: “WHERE HAVE YOU GONE, CHARMING BILLY?”

Analyzing characters by making comparisons can help you better understand a literary text. Practice this skill by answering the **short constructed response** question below.

How are the characters Paul Berlin and Billy Boy Watkins in “Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?” similar? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

◀ STRATEGIES IN ACTION

1. Reread the text, looking closely at the descriptions of Paul Berlin and Billy Boy Watkins.
2. Note how the characters are similar in appearance, personality, or actions.
3. In your answer, share the specific **evidence** you find.

NONFICTION TEXT: “TIM O’BRIEN: THE NAKED SOLDIER”

To demonstrate your understanding of a nonfiction text, you may need to move beyond the text itself and make judgments about how it relates to something else. Practice this skill by answering the **short constructed response** question below.

What insight into O’Brien’s fictional works might a reader gain from “Tim O’Brien: The Naked Soldier”? Support your answer with evidence from the interview.

◀ STRATEGIES IN ACTION

1. Reread the interview, paying attention to what O’Brien says about both his life and his writing.
2. Your response to this prompt should be based on the information in the interview, not necessarily the short story. Include a **direct quotation, paraphrase, or specific synopsis** from the interview as evidence.

COMPARING LITERARY AND NONFICTION TEXTS

Practice making connections between literary and nonfiction texts by applying the following **short constructed response** question to “Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?” and “Tim O’Brien: The Naked Soldier.”

How does Tim O’Brien define heroism in the interview? How is this definition evident in his short story “Where Have You Gone, Charming Billy?” Support your answer with evidence from both texts.

◀ STRATEGIES IN ACTION

1. Note that this question has **two parts**. For the first part, skim the interview to find O’Brien’s definition of heroism. State this definition in your answer.
2. For the second part, scan the short story to find a specific example of heroism. Use the example as evidence to support the definition.