



The Things They Carried

Understanding Characters through Details

The stories and details in *The Things They Carried* reveal a lot about the characters, and these characters help tell the greater story of the Vietnam War. Focusing on the details connected with a character can help focus your understanding of the character as a person and provide insight as to how that character fits into the larger story.

Choose one of the following characters from the novel: Jimmy Cross, the narrator Tim, Norman Bowker, Rat Kiley, Kiowa, Dave Jensen, Henry Dobbins, Curt Lemon, or Mary Anne Bell.

Complete the chart with information from *The Things They Carried*.

Details	Character Name:
Character description	
Character's concerns, desires, fears, motivations	
Stories the character features in	

What happens to the character in the story	
How the character expresses a greater idea about the Vietnam War experience	

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Answer Key

Sample Student Response

Details	Character Name: Mary Anne Bell
Character description	Mark Fossie's sweetheart; 17 years old; just graduated from high school; from Cleveland, Ohio; blond; blue-eyed; strawberry ice cream complexion; tall and big-boned with long, white legs; friendly and flirtatious; initially innocent; comfortable in Vietnam; adventurous; effective with the wounded; didn't mind the gore and was quiet and steady; got drawn in by the shadowy, gruesome parts of war that made her feel alive
Character's concerns, desires, fears, motivations	At first, she just wanted to be with her boyfriend and have an adventure, but then she became attracted to the drama of war. She wanted to feel fully herself and alive. She had no desire to return to her former life in the United States, where she had been planning to become a wife and mother.
Stories the character features in	Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong
What happens to the character in the story	Attracted to the war in Vietnam, she joins the Green Berets and then disappears in the jungles of Vietnam.
How the character expresses a greater idea about the Vietnam War experience	Mary Anne's story illustrates how war changes people, even an innocent 17-year-old girl from the Midwest. It shows, as Rat Kiley says, "You come over clean and you get dirty and then afterward it's never the same," (p. 109). For Mary Anne Bell, "Vietnam had the effect of a powerful drug: that mix of unnamed terror and unnamed pleasure" (p. 109).