

Baggage

Directions: Answer the following questions.

1. This chapter is titled "The Things They Carried." Notice that the necessities or near-necessities are just the beginning of their load. What is the point of the author's enumerating the minor things individuals added to their packs? (Be sure to write these down for the man you are researching.)
2. Define *grunt* and *hump* as they are used in this story.
3. What ironies do you detect in Ted Lavender's death?
4. Why does Lt. Cross react to this death as he does?
5. What is the significance of the pebble Lt. Cross carries in his mouth? What does this action say about aloneness?
6. What is ironic about the item that Norman Bowker carries?
7. What is the significance of Mitchell Sanders' discussion with Henry Dobbins about a moral in connection with cutting off the thumb? What moral does he suggest? What might he mean?
8. Up to this point, the things the men carried were essentially material. In the passage that begins describing how the men carried USO stationery, what other types of things do they carry on their bodies? What does that list imply?
9. Think about the many meanings of the word *things*. Many of the things listed are material, seemingly surface necessities. What nonmaterial things can you see the characters carrying, even if they are not stated?
10. Study the passages in the story that describe the scenes of fighting. Then comment on how the Vietnam War was different from the picture one usually has of war.

11. What is ironic about the supplies they continually get from the United States government?
12. What does Lt. Cross mean when he speaks about grieving for Martha because she belongs to a world that isn't quite real? How does that partly explain why so many people treated Vietnam veterans badly when they returned home?
13. Why does Kiowa want to talk about Ted Lavender's death? What is the dilemma he finds when he thinks about it?
14. Explain the author's description of life being a burden after one has come through the panic of experiencing the fire of warfare.
15. What does the narrator say is the heaviest burden of all?
16. What is their escape mechanism when the siege is over?
17. Why does Lt. Cross burn Martha's letters?
18. How will these experiences in battle affect Lt. Cross's relationship to the men under his command?
19. Most of us have not experienced a battle, but we have experienced trauma or loss of some kind. When you reflect on your experience, which of the reactions, if any, do you relate to in this chapter? What was your trauma or loss? How did you cope?
20. What insights have you gained by reading the experiences of these men?