

After You Read Response and Analysis

Reading Check

1. Tell the story of Billy Boy's death to a partner as you imagine a TV news reporter based in Vietnam might have reported it on the day it happened. Tell **what** happened, **whom** it happened to, **where** it happened, **why** it happened, and **how** it happened.

Thinking Critically

2. There is a central irony in warfare, which has to do with the fact that soldiers kill people they do not even know. What is **ironic**, or contrary to what we would expect, about how Billy Boy dies? about how his body is removed?
3. Explain the significance of each of these story elements:
 - the song "Where Have You Gone, Billy Boy?"
 - the **flashbacks** to camping trips
 - Paul's fit of uncontrollable giggling
 - the **minor character** Toby
4. What do you think Paul has discovered about war and about himself on his first day of combat? What **theme**, or central idea, relating to war is O'Brien expressing in this story?
5. **Tone** is the writer's attitude toward the subject. How would you describe this story's tone? Analyze the way in which O'Brien creates that tone. Cite lines and incidents from the story.
6. In a sense this is a story about a hero's journey. Such journeys often take the form of a **quest**, a search for something of great value. What is it that Paul expects to find at the sea, the endpoint on his journey? Ironically, what does he find instead?

Literary Criticism

7. Think about the story's **historical context**—the 1960s and the period of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. (You will find some nonfiction accounts of the war on pages 744–751.) How does O'Brien's story reflect its historical period and the **themes** and **issues** of that time? Having read this story and the biographical information about the author (see Meet the Writer on page 738), explain how the story likely reflects O'Brien's attitudes toward the Vietnam War. Give examples from the story to support your interpretation. Remember that the **tone** of a work is a good clue to the writer's attitude.
9. Look back at the poem written by a nurse in Vietnam (see the **Connection** on page 739). How does that poem affect your understanding of O'Brien's story and of the Vietnam War?

WRITING

Why War?

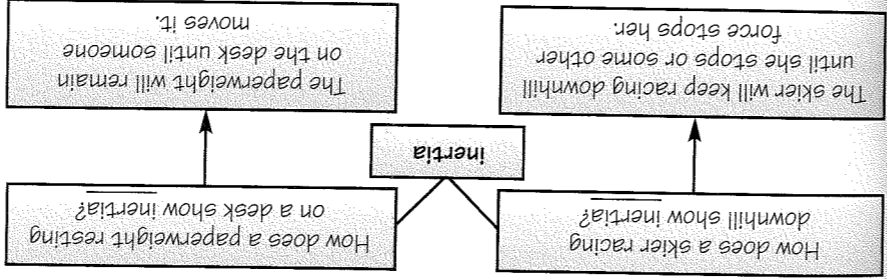
War is a recurring subject in literature and movies. Why do you think writers and filmmakers so often choose war as their subject? Write an **essay** proposing answers to this question. To support your **opinion**, give reasons why some people write about war and its violence and others read about it. At the end of your essay, explain how war stories like this one affect you. (Check your Quickwrite notes before you begin.)

After You Read

Vocabulary Development

Meaning Maps

On page 735, Tim O'Brien uses the word *inertia* to describe a feeling of being pulled as if by a train. Many people think of *inertia* only as laziness or inactivity, but the dictionary refers to it as the "tendency of an object in motion to keep moving in the same direction or of an object at rest to remain at rest, unless the object is affected by another force." Look at the meaning map one student made to understand this word:



PRACTICE 1

Make your own meaning maps for the remaining Word Bank words. You will have to think of your own questions and answers. Compare your maps with a classmate's when you're done.

Synonyms and Connotations

Most English words have several **synonyms**, words with the same or similar meanings. Synonyms usually have different **connotations**, or emotional associations. O'Brien carefully chooses words with connotations that create the effects he wants.

PRACTICE 2

Answer the questions below about connotations:

1. "With clumsy, concrete hands he clawed for his rifle. . . ." Try substituting *heavy* for *concrete* and *reached* for *clawed*. How does the image change?
2. "The moon came out. Pale and shrunken to the size of a dime." What are the connotations of *shrunken*? Why wouldn't it be as big as a dime have the same effect?
3. "But Billy Boy kept bawling, tightening up, his face going pale. . . ." Explain why the words *elegantly* and *delicately* in this context are ironic. What are their connotations?
4. "Shut up!" the big soldier hissed. . . ." Why do you think O'Brien uses *hissed* instead of *whispered* or *said*?
5. "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. . . ." Explain why the words *elegantly* and *delicately* in this context are ironic. What are their connotations?

SKILLS FOCUS

Vocabulary

Make semantic maps. Understand synonyms and connotations.

717

740

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Analyze historical context. Analyze how a writer's background and beliefs are reflected in his or her writings.

Writing Skills

Write an essay supporting an opinion.