

Comparing Literature

Across Time and Place

Compare Literature About War

War has always been part of the human experience. What would your life be like if it were touched by war? The three writers compared here—Tim O'Brien, Tran Mong Tu, Pin Yathay, and Yusef Komunyakaa—explore how war affects individuals swept up in its complex events. In the following selections, they describe the horrors of war and its tragic consequences.

Ambush by Tim O'Brien.....short story....1191

The Gift in Wartime by Tran Mong Tu.....poem....1194

from *Stay Alive, My Son* by Pin Yathay.....memoir....1195

Camouflaging the Chimera by Yusef Komunyakaa....poem....1198

COMPARE THE Big Idea An Era of Protest

People protest, or voice objections, in different ways. Some hold vigils; others march together, waving banners or placards. Still others create literature to change minds and stir hearts. As you read, ask yourself, How do Tim O'Brien, Tran Mong Tu, Pin Yathay, and Yusef Komunyakaa show the human cost of war?

COMPARE Themes

The **theme** is the central message of a work of literature, often expressed as a general statement about life. Each of these writers uses literary elements to convey a theme about war and its consequences. As you read, ask yourself, What theme does each writer share with the reader? What does the theme suggest about the human condition?

COMPARE Cultures

Tim O'Brien, Tran Mong Tu, Pin Yathay, and Yusef Komunyakaa all belong to different cultures, each of which influences the writer's message significantly. Through their choice of words and details, the writers invite readers to enter their worlds, relive their experiences, and share their messages. As you read, ask yourself, What does each selection reveal about the writer's culture?

TEKS

For pages 1188–1199
11.2.A Analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on the human condition.



Lit ON Literature Online

Author Search For more about Tim O'Brien, Tran Mong Tu, Pin Yathay, and Yusef Komunyakaa, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GLA7812u7.

Before You Read

Ambush

Meet **Tim O'Brien**
(born 1946)

Recognized as one of the major writers on the Vietnam War, Tim O'Brien has earned both critical and popular acclaim for his novels, short stories, and nonfiction works. His writing often describes the experiences of ordinary soldiers in Vietnam and explores philosophical issues, such as the meaning of courage, duty, and honor.

As a political science major at Macalester College in Minnesota, O'Brien protested the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Then, shortly after his college graduation, O'Brien received a draft notice. For the rest of that summer, he struggled with his conscience trying to decide what to do. He considered escaping to Canada, where many other war protesters had fled. Finally, he decided to report for induction and enter the service, thereby honoring a family tradition.

"The object of storytelling, like the object of magic, is not to explain or to resolve, but rather to create and to perform miracles of the imagination."

—Tim O'Brien

Soldier and Writer Beginning in 1968, O'Brien spent just over a year in Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam, as an infantryman and as a clerk. He became a sergeant and earned several medals, including the Purple Heart, an award given to U.S. soldiers wounded or killed in battle. While stationed in Vietnam, O'Brien kept a journal, recording his observations and impressions. These

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Texas Author



journal entries later furnished material for his books. His first book, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973), is a memoir of his tour of duty in Vietnam.

Writer of War Stories In 1978, O'Brien wrote a novel called *Going After Cacciato* (kà chá* tsi), about a soldier who simply decides to walk away from the Vietnam War one day. O'Brien won the National Book Award for this novel in 1979. He was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his short-story collection, *The Things They Carried* (1990). Today O'Brien is a faculty member of Texas State University at San Marcos.

O'Brien's fiction has been compared to that of Stephen Crane, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Heller, and others who have written about war. Like those authors, he builds a picture of soldiers' daily lives by compiling masses of sensory details. Unlike Crane and Hemingway, he intertwines fantasy with reality in his war stories.

O'Brien has said that he probably will continue to write about the Vietnam War because he believes that the emotions in war and those in ordinary life are almost identical. His recent novels include *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994) and *Tomcat in Love* (1999). Each of these novels alludes to events that occurred in Vietnam.

Lit ON Literature Online

Author Search For more about Tim O'Brien, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GLA7812u7.

TIM O'BRIEN 1189

1188 UNIT 7 INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Literature and Reading Preview

Connect to the Story

Why do some experiences continue to haunt one's memory? Write a journal entry in which you describe a significant memory that has stayed with you.

Build Background

From 1965 to 1973, U.S. troops fought alongside the South Vietnamese in their struggle against the communist Viet Cong from the North.

Set Purposes for Reading

Big Idea An Era of Protest

During the Vietnam War, student protests were common in the U.S. and in South Vietnam. As you read, ask yourself, How is this story a protest against the Vietnam War?

Literary Element Mood

The **mood** of a story or poem is the feeling or atmosphere that a writer creates. Writers develop a mood with carefully chosen words and details that vividly describe the setting and events. As you read, ask yourself, What words and details help to create the mood?

Reading Strategy Analyze Concrete Details

Concrete details are vivid sensory details, or evocative words and phrases that appeal to one or more of the five senses. To convey fear, a writer might include concrete details such as a clenched jaw, a dry mouth, or sweaty palms. As you read, ask,

- What do the details emphasize?
- What does this emphasis imply?

Tip: Note Details Use a chart to record concrete details in the story and what they imply.



Details	Implications
"the dense brush along the trail"	The narrator's hiding place seems safe and well-hidden.

Vocabulary

grope (grōp) v. to feel about uncertainly with the hands; to search blindly; p. 1191 *I groped in the dark while searching for my keys.*

stooped (stōopt) adj. bent forward and downward; p. 1192 *Stooped with fatigue, he looked as though he carried a heavy load on his shoulders.*

ponder (ponˈdər) v. to think about thoroughly and carefully; p. 1192 *In combat, soldiers have no time to reflect and ponder; instead, they must react quickly without thinking.*

gape (gāp) v. to stare with the mouth open, as in wonder or surprise; p. 1192 *Stunned and shaken, the soldier gaped at his fallen comrade.*

dwel (dwell) v. to think about at length; p. 1192 *Even if one tries not to dwell on painful memories, they sometimes refuse to go away.*

Tip: Word Origins The study of word origins and their development is called **etymology**. Etymologies are often found in dictionary entries and can help you understand the modern meaning of a word. If you know that the word *ponder*, for example, came from a word that meant "to weigh," you can understand how someone who ponders a difficult decision can almost feel its heaviness.



Indiana Rangers: The Army Guard in Vietnam, 1964. Mort Künstler. Oil on canvas, 24 x 52 in. Collection National Guard Bureau, Pentagon, Washington, DC.

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AMBUSH

Tim O'Brien

When she was nine, my daughter Kathleen asked if I had ever killed anyone. She knew about the war; she knew I'd been a soldier. "You keep writing these war stories," she said, "so I guess you must've killed somebody." It was a difficult moment, but I did what seemed right, which was to say, "Of course not," and then to take her onto my lap and hold her for a while. Someday, I hope, she'll ask again. But here I want to pretend she's a grown-up. I want to tell her exactly what happened, or what I remember happening, and then I want to say to her that as a little girl she was absolutely right. This is why I keep writing war stories:

He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him—afraid of something—and as he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him.

Or to go back: Shortly after midnight we moved into the ambush site outside My Khe. The whole platoon¹ was there, spread out in the dense brush along the trail, and for five hours nothing at

all happened. We were working in two-man teams—one man on guard while the other slept, switching off every two hours—and I remember it was still dark when Kiowa shook me awake for the final watch. The night was foggy and hot. For the first few moments I felt lost, not sure about directions, **groping** for my helmet and weapon. I reached out and found three grenades and lined them up in front of me; the pins had already been straightened for quick throwing. And then for maybe half an hour I kneeled there and waited. Very gradually, in tiny slivers, dawn began to break through the fog, and from my position in the brush I could see ten or fifteen meters up the trail. The mosquitoes were fierce. I remember slapping at them, wondering if I should wake up Kiowa and ask for some repellent, then thinking it was a bad idea, then looking up and seeing the young man come out of the fog.

Analyze Concrete Details Why does the author include the detail about the pins of the grenades?

Vocabulary

grope (grōp) v. to feel about uncertainly with the hands; to search blindly

1. A platoon is a military unit, usually commanded by a lieutenant, that forms part of a company.

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He wore black clothing and rubber sandals and a gray ammunition belt. His shoulders were slightly **stooped**, his head cocked to the side as if listening for something. He seemed at ease. He carried his weapon in one hand, muzzle down, moving without any hurry up the center of the trail. There was no sound at all—none that I can remember. In a way, it seemed, he was part of the morning fog, or my own imagination, but there was also the reality of what was happening in my stomach. I had already pulled the pin on a grenade. I had come up to a crouch. It was entirely automatic. I did not hate the young man; I did not see him as the enemy; I did not **ponder** issues of morality or politics or military duty. I crouched and kept my head low. I tried to swallow whatever was rising from my stomach, which tasted like lemonade, something fruity and sour. I was terrified. There were no thoughts about killing. The grenade was to make him go away—just evaporate—and I leaned back and felt my mind go empty and then felt it fill up again. I had already thrown the grenade before telling myself to throw it. The brush was thick and I had to lob it high, not aiming, and I remember the grenade seeming to freeze above me for an instant, as if a camera had clicked, and I remember ducking down and holding my breath and seeing little wisps of fog rise from the earth. The grenade bounced once and rolled across the trail. I did not hear it, but there must've been a sound, because the young man dropped his weapon and began to run, just two or three quick steps, then he hesitated, swiveling to his right, and he glanced down at the grenade and tried to cover his head but never did. It occurred to

Mood What feelings does the detail about the fog stir?

Vocabulary

stooped (stoopt) *adj.* bent forward and downward
ponder (pon•der) *v.* to think about thoroughly and carefully

me then that he was about to die. I wanted to warn him. The grenade made a popping noise—not soft but not loud either—not what I'd expected—and there was a puff of dust and smoke—a small white puff—and the young man seemed to jerk upward as if pulled by invisible wires. He fell on his back. His rubber sandals had been blown off. There was no wind. He lay at the center of the trail, his right leg bent beneath him, his one eye shut, his other eye a huge star-shaped hole.

It was not a matter of live or die. There was no real peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way.

Later, I remember, Kiowa tried to tell me that the man would've died anyway. He told me that it was a good kill, that I was a soldier and this was a war, that I should shape up and stop staring and ask myself what the dead man would've done if things were reversed.

None of it mattered. The words seemed far too complicated. All I could do was **gape** at the fact of the young man's body.

Even now I haven't finished sorting it out. Sometimes I forgive myself, other times I don't. In the ordinary hours of life I try not to **dwell** on it, but now and then, when I'm reading a newspaper or just sitting alone in a room, I'll look up and see the young man coming out of the morning fog. I'll watch him walk toward me, his shoulders slightly stooped, his head cocked to the side, and he'll pass within a few yards of me and suddenly smile at some secret thought and then continue up the trail to where it bends back into the fog.

An Era of Protest What attitude toward war does the first complete paragraph in this column reveal?

Vocabulary

gaps (gap) *v.* to stare with the mouth open, as in wonder or surprise
dwell (dwell) *v.* to think about at length

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After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

- Connect to Personal Experience** If you could speak with the narrator about his experience in Vietnam, what would you talk about?
- Analyze Motivation** How does the narrator respond to his daughter's question? In your opinion, why does he lie to her?
- Make Inferences About Theme** What does the narrator do when he sees the young man? What does this episode suggest about the theme, or central message?
- Analyze Narrator** How does Kiowa tell the narrator, and how does the narrator feel about this advice? What does this exchange suggest to you about the narrator's values?
- Evaluate Narrator** Do the narrator's reactions to the killing of an enemy soldier seem convincing to you? Explain.
- Make Inferences About Structure** A frame story is a story that either surrounds or introduces a more important story. What effect does O'Brien achieve by using a frame story?
- Big Idea Draw Conclusions About Author's Purpose** In what ways does this story protest the Vietnam War?

Literary Element Mood

To determine **mood**, look closely at scene-setting descriptions and reactions of characters to events.

- Analyze Mood** How would you describe the mood of "Ambush"? What details contribute to it?
- Make Inferences About Mood** How does the mood of the story affect its overall impact on you? Explain.

Reading Strategy Analyze Concrete Details

Review the **concrete details** that describe the young man's appearance in the story.

- What is the effect of reading about what the young man wore, carried, and did immediately before and after the narrator tosses the grenade?
- How do the concrete details in the final paragraph help you understand the narrator?

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Selection Resources For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GLA7812ur.

Vocabulary Practice

Practice with Word Origins Studying the etymology, or origin and history, of a word can help you better understand and explore its meaning. Create a word map for each of these vocabulary words. Include the word's definition and etymology, and write a sentence in which you use the word correctly. Use a print or online dictionary for help.

grope stooped ponder gape dwell

Writing

Write a Journal Entry Imagine you are the narrator's daughter Kathleen, now an adult, and your father has just told you this story. How would you react? Write a journal entry in which you record your thoughts and feelings about your father's actions in Vietnam, as well as his decision to postpone telling you the truth. Does he deserve forgiveness? Why or why not?



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The Gift in Wartime

Tran Mong Tu

Translated by Vann Phan

**Build Background**

"War is a terrible thing," says Tran Mong Tu (trần mông tu), who has had firsthand experience with the war in Vietnam. By the time the United States became heavily involved in the Vietnam War in the 1960s, Tran worked for the Associated Press (a large U.S. news service) in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam. When the United States pulled its troops out of South Vietnam in 1975, the Associated Press evacuated its Vietnamese employees because it feared communist reprisal against those working for U.S. interests. In Tran's poem, the speaker contrasts her gifts to a dead loved one and his gifts to her.

Quickwrite

Much of the power of this poem comes from the writer's use of contrasting images. In two or three paragraphs, discuss these contrasting images and comment on their overall impact.

I offer you roses
Buried in your new grave
I offer you my wedding gown
To cover your tomb still green with grass

5 You give me medals
Together with silver stars
And the yellow pips¹ on your badge
Unused and still shining

I offer you my youth
The days we were still in love
My youth died away
When they told me the bad news

You give me the smell of blood
From your war dress
15 Your blood and your enemy's
So that I may be moved

I offer you clouds
That linger on my eyes on summer days
I offer you cold winters
20 Amid my springtime of life

You give me your lips with no smile
You give me your arms without tenderness
You give me your eyes with no sight
And your motionless body

25 Seriously, I apologize to you
I promise to meet you in our next life
I will hold this shrapnel² as a token
By which we will recognize each other

1. Pips are military badges of rank worn on the shoulder.
2. Shrapnel are fragments scattered from an exploding shell or bomb.

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Build Background

Pin Yathay (pin ya' tí) was born in the village of Oudong, just north of Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital and largest city. When the Khmer Rouge, a communist political organization, seized power in Cambodia in 1975, Pin Yathay knew he was in danger because of his position as an employee of the state. As the situation worsened, he and his family joined the refugees who clogged the roads,

seeking safety away from the cities. Eventually, most of Pin Yathay's family died of malnutrition, disease, or murder. The Khmer Rouge, which controlled the government until 1979, executed an estimated one to three million citizens—anyone it felt was a threat. Pin Yathay survived this nightmare and lived to tell audiences throughout the world about his ordeal.

from Stay Alive, My Son

Pin Yathay
with John Man

My first reaction was to give way to despair, to give up, to surrender to my fate. Everything was lost, I was going to die anyway, I knew that. There was no escape. We swelled up¹ and died. It was the law of nature, unalterable. We all died one after another. There was nothing to be done. What did it matter? I would die, and the sooner the better, there in the house with my wife and son.

Then the true enormity² of my situation struck me. There would be no such choice. Even that tiny freedom would be taken from me. There would be no gentle, natural passing

1. Their bodies swelled up, or became bloated, from malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies.

Vocabulary

enormity (i nŏr' əs tē) n. outrageousness; state of being monstrous

with my family beside me. They were going to slaughter me, like an animal, away in the forest.

At that thought, I felt another sensation, a surge of raw energy that drove out all other feelings. The instinct for self-preservation took over, and I suddenly, desperately, wanted to stay alive. I told myself: "Pull yourself together! Sharpen up! Get out of this! You've always succeeded before! This is your last chance! Do something!"

I began to think. What was to be done? Leave alone? But there was Nawath across the hut, lying prostrate,² his limbs swollen. I could hardly bear the thought of leaving him and Any. But neither could I imagine escaping with them. Better they should have a chance to live here than die with me. Better that I

2. Prostrate means "flat on the ground," in this case from exhaustion.

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should get away, and give myself a chance to live, or at least die on my own terms.

It was all very simple. My mind was made up. I had to tell Any of my decision, that very evening.

After we had eaten, as we sat on the floor opposite each other, with Nawath sleeping behind his cloth partition across the hut, I prepared myself to impose on Any. But as I prepared, but that did not make me any less nervous. It was a terrible thing to do to us as a family, a terrible thing to impose on Any. But as I glanced up at her, and saw her sweet and wasted features lit dimly by the flickering flames of the cooking fire, I knew there was no other course. It was purposeless to stay on there merely to face death. They would be alone all too soon, anyway.

"Any, my dearest," I said, "I have something to tell you." She looked up, without surprise, and I realized she had been expecting a decision of some kind. She too must have known that I could not stay. Speaking softly in order not to wake Nawath—I could see his little bloated face round the edge of the partition—I began to explain. I was doomed, I said. All the former high officials had disappeared. I was trained in the West. I was irredeemable³ in the eyes of the Khmer Rouge. They would come for me in a week, and that would be that. "But you're a woman, Any, if you were alone with Nawath I don't think they would harm you."

She said nothing, but I saw her gaze turn to one of horror.

"You can live on here with Nawath," I went on. "It's the only answer. I'll take my chances in the forest. If I succeed, we'll meet again. But I have to go soon. In one week, it'll be too late."

"You'll leave?" she said. "Leave me here with Nawath?" And suddenly she began to sob as if she were being torn apart.

"Yes, my dearest. It's the only way," I said, desperately. For the first time, I began to real-

3. *Irredeemable* here refers to being unable to be changed or reformed to accept the new government.

ize that she had not come to the same conclusion as me. "What did you think?"

"Not that. Not that."

I said nothing, for there was only one other course open, the one that was impossible to contemplate. She would see that in a few minutes, I thought, and accept my decision.

But no. With hesitations and bitter sobs, she went on, "It's impossible, my dearest. . . . I don't want to be separated from you. . . . I prefer to die with you rather than to stay here. . . ." As I listened to her in silence, unable to say anything to stem the slow, whispered outpouring of words and sobs and tears, I couldn't believe that she understood what she was saying. Soon, soon, she would see, and know why I had to go alone. "I cannot live without you!" she sobbed. "I prefer to die quickly and cleanly, with you."

She paused, wracked by sobs. I waited for her to say: But if you think it is for the best, of course that is how it must be.

Silence. To my astonishment, I began to realize she meant what she said. For the first time in our lives, she was refusing to accept my judgment of what was best.

The silence dragged on, broken only by her gasps. She was looking at me. I could see the highlights cast by the fire on her cheeks and in her eyes. Still she said nothing further. I knew then she had understood all along what she was saying.

I felt the strength of her, as well. Once, she had asked my opinion even before buying a dress. Now she had been hardened by experience. She knew what she was doing, knew that in any event she and Nawath would die, knew that we were in the process not of choosing life over death, but of choosing different ways of dying.

And she knew that, having chosen, there was one more fearful choice still to make. There seemed nothing I could do or say to help her through it. It was too awful for me to put into words. If I spoke the words, it would turn something that was merely a nightmarish fear into dreadful reality. I could not say them.

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"But," she said at last. "But what shall we do with Nawath?"

Yes: those were the words I had refused to utter.

"Tell me, Thy dearest. What shall we do with Nawath?" She broke down again as she struggled to express the thought. "He can't come with us. We can't carry him, and he can't walk far. They would catch us and kill us before. . . ." She paused, her face working to control her emotion. "We. . . we have to leave him behind. But. . . what are we going to do with him if we leave him?" She broke off again, overcome by sobs.

Could she really contemplate leaving Nawath? It seemed an extraordinary thing for a mother to do. I realize now that she had made a mother's supreme sacrifice. People say that for a mother the supreme sacrifice is to die with her child. No—if death is inevitable, the mother's supreme sacrifice is to abandon her child, if thereby she can prolong her own life.

I did not understand all that right then and there. But I felt her resolve, and knew there was nothing I could say to make her change her mind. After what we had been through, after being made one body with her by what we had endured together, it never even occurred to me to argue her out of her decision. I don't think I could have done so. I simply had to accept that things were different now.

Any was still sobbing. "What do we do with Nawath?" she asked again, and fell silent. I knew from her tone of voice, and the silence, that she already knew the answer, for there

Vocabulary
inevitable (i nev'ə bəl) adj. incapable of being avoided or evaded

was only one. Knowing it, again neither of us could bring ourselves to express it. Again, expressing it would make it **irrevocable**.

I glanced at Nawath, still asleep. I felt I wanted to go to him, stroke his head, provide some comfort for him, or myself. But I did not move. I couldn't risk waking him. I glanced back at Any. Her eyes were lowered, as if waiting for me to pronounce sentence.

After another eternal minute, the burden of silence became intolerable. I felt it as an accusation against me for evading responsibility.

"You know there is only one thing to do," I whispered. "We must take him to the hospital."

The hospital, where people went only to die. I looked into the shadows of her eyes. "We must," I said.

She knew that this time I was right. Nawath's chances were better in that morgue of a place than in the forest, while ours were better in the forest than there in the village. We would all die anyway; but to **ensure** we all lived as long as possible we had to leave him. While we would at least die together, he would die alone, abandoned by the only ones who cared for him.

Vocabulary
irrevocable (i rev'ə kə bəl) adj. not possible to undo
ensure (en shoor) v. to make certain; guarantee

Discussion Starter
Meet with a small group to discuss whether Pin Yathay and Any made the only reasonable choice in their situation or not. Consider whether they acted according to their values or whether they were simply trying to save themselves. Summarize your discussion for the rest of your class.

But I felt her resolve, and knew there was nothing I could say to make her change her mind.



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Camouflaging the Chimera

Yusef Komunyakaa

Build Background

Like Tim O'Brien, Yusef Komunyakaa served in the American armed forces during the Vietnam War. Although Komunyakaa went to Vietnam as a correspondent and managing editor for the *Southern Cross*, a military newspaper, he did not publish any poetry about the war until 1986. His poem "Camouflaging the Chimera" carefully outlines how soldiers dressed to become invisible in the Vietnamese landscape. In ancient Greek mythology, the chimera was a fire-breathing monster that destroyed the regions of Lycia and Caria. Today, the word *chimera* also refers to an illusion or an imagined creation.

We tied branches to our helmets.
We painted our faces & rifles
with mud from a riverbank.

5 blades of grass hung from the pockets
of our tiger suits.¹ We wove
ourselves into the terrain,
content to be a hummingbird's target.

10 We hugged bamboo & leaned
against a breeze off the river,
slow-dragging with ghosts

from Saigon to Bangkok,²
with women left in doorways
reaching in from America.
We aimed at dark-hearted songbirds.

15 In our way station of shadows
rock apes³ tried to blow our cover,
throwing stones at the sunset. Chameleons

20 crawled our spines, changing from day
to night: green to gold,
gold to black. But we waited
till the moon touched metal,

till something almost broke
inside us. VC⁴ struggled
with the hillside, like black silk

25 wrestling iron through grass.
We weren't there. The river ran
through our bones. Small animals took
refuge
against our bodies; we held our breath,

30 ready to spring the L-shaped
ambush, as a world revolved
under each man's eyelid.

Quickwrite

Write for a few minutes about the mood, or emotional quality, of "Camouflaging the Chimera." How would you describe the mood of the poem? What words, images, or ideas help create this mood?

1. Tiger suits are black-and-green striped camouflage uniforms.
2. Saigon (sai gon)—now called Ho Chi Minh City—was the capital of South Vietnam. Bangkok (bang' lok) is the capital of Thailand.
3. Here, rock apes refers to the monkeys who live in the Vietnamese mountains.
4. VC refers to the Vietcong forces.

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Wrap-Up: Comparing Literature

Across Time and Place

- *Ambush* by Tim O'Brien
- *The Gift in Wartime* by Tran Mong Tu
- *from Stay Alive, My Son* by Pin Yathay
- *Camouflaging the Chimera* by Yusef Komunyakaa

COMPARE THE Big Idea An Era of Protest

Writing Activity The writers of these selections created literary works to protest the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. Review each selection. Then write a brief essay discussing how each writer reveals the human cost of war. Cite evidence from each selection to support your ideas.

COMPARE Themes

Group Activity Though Tim O'Brien, Tran Mong Tu, Pin Yathay, and Yusef Komunyakaa all write about the tragedy of war, each conveys a distinct theme, or message, about this subject. With a small group, discuss the following questions:

1. What message about war does each writer share with the reader? How does each theme suggest a comment about the human condition?
2. What literary elements does each writer use to convey his or her message?
3. Which of the selections, in your opinion, makes the most effective protest against war? Support your answer.

COMPARE Cultures

Visual Display Culture influences a writer's ideas and choice of subject, words, and images. Tim O'Brien and Yusef Komunyakaa grew up in the U.S.; Tran Mong Tu, in Vietnam; and Pin Yathay, in Cambodia. Create a visual display to accompany one of the four selections. Include images that reflect the writer's culture, such as a collage of photographs or works of art. If possible, present your display orally to your classmates.



Marker at the extermination camp of Choeung Ek.

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