

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: OOHS English Department Grade: 11-12 School: OOHS

Book Title: Going After Cacciato Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Author: Tim O'Brien Pages: 336

Publisher: Broadway Books (Random House) Copyright: 1978

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

"To call Going After Cacciato a novel about war is like calling Moby-Dick a novel about whales."

So wrote The New York Times of Tim O'Brien's now classic novel of Vietnam. Winner of the 1979 National Book Award, Going After Cacciato captures the peculiar mixture of horror and hallucination that marked this strangest of wars.

In a blend of reality and fantasy, this novel tells the story of a young soldier who one day lays down his rifle and sets off on a quixotic journey from the jungles of Indochina to the streets of Paris. In its memorable evocation of men both fleeing from and meeting the demands of battle, Going After Cacciato stands as much more than just a great war novel. Ultimately it's about the forces of fear and heroism that do battle in the hearts of us all.

http://www.amazon.com/Going-After-Cacciato-Tim-O'Brien/dp/0767904427/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1404917134&sr=1-1&keywords=going+after+cacciato

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

The curricular requirements from the College Board for AP English Literature & Composition includes the following statement: "...by the time the student completes AP English Literature and Composition she or he will have studied literature from both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times. The works selected for the course should require careful, deliberative reading that yields multiple meanings." Going After Cacciato is what many would consider a contemporary classic. Furthermore, works by Tim O'Brien frequently appear on the AP English Literature & Composition Exam's free-response essay question as a suggested text. As such, this contemporary tour-de-force is ideal for study in the AP Literature & Composition course.

This text is one of several options for students to read as a part of their summer reading before entering the AP English Literature & Composition course at OOHS. They read this text in tandem with Thomas Foster's How to Read Novels Like a Professor, journaling in response to both texts.

The skills of reading, or rather the thinking moves, that Foster outlines in his text are hallmarks of the study of reading novels and plays in the course. Because of its mixture of complexity and accessibility for high school students, *Going After Cacciato* is ideally suited for this pairing. In addition to the summer work, students will have the opportunity to write about the novel multiple times throughout the year, mostly in timed-writing settings, a practice necessary for success on the AP English Literature & Composition Exam.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

From The New York Times on the Web

February 12, 1978

A Separate Peace

By Richard Freedman

It won't do the Vietnam dead much good to know that here is a novel that makes us think of Hemingway, but survivors should certainly take note of the highly original work by Tim O' Brien, a Vietnam veteran and Washington Post foreign affairs reporter.

By turns lurid and lyrical, "Going After Cacciato" combines a surface of realistic war reportage as fine as any in Michael Herr's recent "Dispatches" with a deeper feel -- perhaps possible only in fiction -- of the surrealistic effect war has on the daydreams and nightmares of the combatants. To call "Going After Cacciato" a novel about war is like calling "Moby Dick" a novel about whales.

A pleasant, moon-faced, gum-chewing Private Cacciato, one rainy day in 1968, decides that on the whole he'd rather be in Paris. So in his divine simplicity he starts to hike the 8,600 miles to the City of Light. His buddies in the Third Squad, First Platoon, Alpha Company, First Battalion of the 46th Infantry start after the deserter to haul him back to the realities of duty. But as the epigraph from Siegfried Sasson says, "Soldiers are dreamers," and ever so gradually Cacciato's dream of peace becomes the dream of his pursuers until the line between cowardly desertion and righteous pursuit blurs, "Cacciato" in Italian means "hunted" or "caught": the novel concerns the way in which the hunters are caught in a vision of life far from the horrors of war.

In the process, the pursuers - and the reader - discover some truths about themselves and the nature of human existence. They learn that horror is not confined to combat. In Teheran they witness a young Iranian soldier's beheading for going A.W.O.L. The soldier had tried to meet appalling death with dignity, but was prevented by a fly's persistence in landing on his nose during the execution - a metaphor. They learn how the lack of ideological commitment among the American troops in this has made the suffering both easier and harder than the wars considered more "just".

On the one hand, as the novel points out, "A soldier's interest is in means, not ends": he must simply go on mission after mission until he is killed, but the "inner mission" is for "every man to learn the important things about himself." Ultimately, of all the things the Americans in Vietnam didn't know, starting with the language and mores of the people they were both protecting and killing, the crucial, overriding area of ignorance was that "They did not know good from evil," and therefore could know nothing of themselves.

But this makes a genuinely serious novel sound serious minded, in an educational-television way; and far from being a high-minded, low-voltage debate on the rights and wrongs of Vietnam, "going After Cacciato" is fully dramatized account of men both in action and escaping from it.

Cacciato himself is as faceless as the white whale, appearing occasionally as Christ figure ("the light of the world"), as a Buddhist monk in Mandalay, as just another happily lost G.I. in Paris. His pursuers, though are also sharply characterized, from Pic. Paul-Berlin, the most reflecting and imaginative of them, to Stink Harris, who jumps ship just outside Piraeus to escape capture that the others easily elude.

All are haunted by their killing of a West Point lieutenant whose by-the-book insistence on investigating hillside caves before blowing them up had resulted in the death of two of their comrades. Only Sarkin Aung Wan, a lissome Vietnamese lass who tags along on the epic journey-as a refugee she has her own dreams of Paris - seems fabricated for the movie version.

Tim O'Brien's writing is crisp, authentic and grimly ironic (one chapter is headed "Light at the End of the Tunnel in Paris," recalling certain optimistic high-level predictions made during the war). As the characters are making their separate peace, their farewell to arms, Hemingway rhythms emerge: "The cart was piled high with lamps and rugs and furniture. Three women sat there. The two old women were bawling" suggests an interchapter of "In Our Time"; and elsewhere a famous passage in "A Farewell to Arms" is paraphrased: "What remained was simple event. The facts, the physical things." Terrain, too, is described with something of the cool observant that once described the green hills of Africa.

Perhaps all American writing about war must pay homage to Hemingway. But "Going After Cacciato" is unique in the way it counterpoints the gritty realism of combat against a dreamlike state in which "Money was never a problem, passports were never required. There were always new places to dance."

Clearly we are dealing here with what the new South American novelists would call "magical realism." to combine the two and make the result esthetically convincing as a major achievement and possibly the only way to deal with the truths of Vietnam.

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/09/20/specials/obrien-cacciato.html>

Review #2

KIRKUS REVIEW

It's hard not to be of two more or less uneasy minds about this ambitious book. O'Brien (If I Die In A War Zone, Northern Lights) has come directly to his subject--Vietnam--with great formal care and deep knowledge, and yet at least half the time it feels as if he's traveling in someone else's boots. In a fugue of fantasy chapters interspersed with astringently realistic flashbacks, Specialist Fourth Class Paul Berlin endures the life of a foot-soldier in Quang Ngai province; when a grunt named Cacciato--"dumb as a bullet"--one day picks up and sets off through the jungle, destination Paris, Berlin's patrol is sent after him. Fantasy takes over as, through Laos, India, Iran, Greece, and finally Paris, a dream of "possibility" and peace develops that could not be in greater contrast to the hell (in flashbacks) of normal war: the fragging of a by-the-book lieutenant, a medic feeding a dying soldier M&Ms and calling them "pills," desperate basketball games in the jungle. The revulsion, pity, and sheer documentary vividness O'Brien can draw from his real-Vietnam material is truly remarkable. But the fantasy journey and the Cacciato metaphor lack parallel strength: "The real

issue was the power of the will to defeat fear. . . . Somehow working his way into that secret chamber of the human heart, where, in tangles, lay the circuitry for all that was possible, the full range of what a man might be." Such fustian/imitation-Hemingway tendencies rub up against balloony characters like a young Vietnamese refugee girl who accompanies the Quixote-like patrol on its mission to Paris and who seems more like an obligation to story than a deeply felt personality. "Where was the fulcrum? Where did it tilt from fact to imagination? How far had Cacciato led them?" Paul Berlin wonders--and so do we as we follow O'Brien through what's too often a large shell that unfairly shadows writing and intelligence of the highest order and honesty.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/tim-obrien/going-after-cacciato/>

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: Atonement Author: Ian McEwan

Title: The Bean Trees Author: Barbara Kingsolver

Title: The Bluest Eye Author: Toni Morrison

Title: The Kite Runner Author: Khaled Hosseini

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

Profanity: Perhaps the most substantially controversial content is the use of profanity throughout the novel. O'Brien's depiction of soldiers in the Vietnam setting makes somewhat frequent use of expletives and derogatory terms; e.g., damn, bitch, fuck(-in; -er), shit, ass, bastard, and dink.

Violence: Again, because of the setting, some war violence is to be expected. However, the focus is less on the explicit description of war violence than on the subjective response to the violence in the mind of the protagonist.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable): N/A

Date Submitted to Department Chair: Summer 2014

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults