



The focus of our summer reading will be *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. You will need a copy of the book so that you can write in it. If you need help obtaining a copy, let me know, and I'll help.

I'll skip all the background and just give you one exchange from a 2008 conversation between Josephine Reed, an audio producer at the National Endowment of the Arts, and Tim O'Brien talking about the book:

Reed: You structured this book in such an interesting way. Each individual story is like a small gem, like a pearl necklace. But when you string them together, the cumulative effect is powerful.

O'Brien: That's my goal. I wanted to have self-contained stories that I think all chapters of books ought to be anyway. Yet I wanted each story to receive the light of other stories, the way it would in a necklace. Or one gemstone would receive the light of the ruby next to it. Although they are meant to stand alone, it seems to me that in the end, you aim ambitiously for what all writers worth their salt aim at—of making a book of art, of some sort. And that's the sense of pieces being in position so that they can reflect. So that the pieces are capable of not just reflecting but absorbing the light of the others.

Your Tasks:

- Read the book.
- Consider each story not only individually but also as a piece that is intentionally included and positioned within the greater movement of the collection.
- Ask questions of the text you are reading and of yourself as a reader. When I read, I love “How does it work?” and “So what?” Find your own questions and try to answer them. Figure out a way to record your thinking.
- When you have finished reading, let the book sit for a few days. When you pick it up again later, find a passage from the book that is roughly 40 lines in length and mark it up. You can color mark, annotate, write in the margins, or re-write it on a document to analyze. The passage you select should be one that you feel is integral to not only the story in which it appears but also to the collection.

I'd love for each of us to come with an entirely different selection so that we can explore. When we return in the fall, we will use these passages as starting points for discussion and for further work.

I cannot guarantee that I'll have regular access to email, especially when I am traveling, but I will respond as I am able:
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