**Survivor’s Guilt**

In this lesson, students will understand the difficulties veteran’s face following deployment as they attempt to readjust to civilian life.

**Lesson Summary**

In this lesson, students will understand the difficulties veteran’s face following deployment as they attempt to readjust to civilian life. The class will read a portion of *The Things They Carried* and view William Bitz’s story from Prairie Memories. Students will use these stories to analyze the complexities of PTSD and the decisions returning soldiers ultimately must face.

**Time allotment**

2 50-minute Class Period, with homework the night before

**Learning Objectives**

RL.3 Analyze how and why characters and/or textual elements develop and interact over the course of a text.

RL.9 Analyze and evaluate how two or more texts within and/or across time periods treat similar themes or topics.

**Supplies**

“Speaking of Courage” and “Notes” from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien

William Bitz’s story from Prairie Memories <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXgRNXhjk2o> (23:59-25:53)

**Learning Activities**

1. Students should have read “Speaking of Courage” prior to class, completing the Story Chart to guide their reading.
2. Begin class with a think-pair-share activity in which students:
   1. Relate the portion of Norman Bowker’s story that seems the most important
   2. Relate the emotions Bowker experienced in the above event
3. Students should critically read [Over a Quarter-Million Vietnam War Veterans Still Have PTSD](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/over-quarter-million-vietnam-war-veterans-still-have-ptsd-180955997/)
4. With a partner, students should answer the following questions relating the Smithsonian article and Bowker’s experiences:
   1. What symptoms given in the article did Bowker display in “Speaking of Courage”?
   2. Identify factors researchers are studying that may explain why some veterans overcome PTSD while others’ symptoms get worse with time.
   3. Which of the above factors do you believe would contribute most strongly to Bowker’s PTSD? Support your answer with textual evidence from the novel and the Smithsonian article.
5. Students should read “Notes” prior to the next class period, completing the Story Chart to guide their reading.
6. Students should view William Bitz’s story and complete a Venn diagram for comparison to Bowker’s story.
7. Taking into consideration “Speaking of Courage,” “Notes,” and William Bitz’ story, students should put themselves into the shoes of either Bowker or Bitz and create a piece of [therapy art](http://www.arttherapyblog.com/ptsd/art-therapy-helping-veterans/#.WiB09UqnE2x) that would be an appropriate response to either man’s experiences.

**Culminating Activity**

Students will write a short response to this prompt:

What is the role of shame in the lives of these soldiers? Does it drive them to acts of heroism, or stupidity? Or both? What is the relationship between shame and courage, according to O'Brien? Provide at least three pieces of textual evidence to support your answer. Integrate the quote effectively and use proper MLA parenthetical citation.

Teachers could choose to have students share their responses in small groups or as a whole-class discussion.

**Extension Activity**

In small group or whole-class discussion, or as a writing activity, students should discuss how the title of novel applies to Norman Bowker.