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Setting in The Things They Carried

In The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien was a book about soldiers in Vietnam and the struggles they went through in these times. The setting in particular took a big role in this book. It showed what the soldiers went through and talked about where they lived for the times they were over there. The setting effects the way the story is told because the major events that have happened in the book such as Kiowa’s death, the Night Life, and the stream where Kiowa’s moccasins are placed, all have a significant meaning to the people who were involved in these incidents.

In The Things They Carried, there was a field that played a big role in the soldiers life where one of their own died called the “shit field.” Kiowa died in an explosion in this field. One of the soldiers said that he was pulling out a photo of his girlfriend names Billie and he shined his flashlight on the photo. As soon as the flashlight went on, the bomb fell and Kiowa died. In the book the narrator says “like murder, the boy though. The flashlight made it happen. Dumb and dangerous. And as a result his friend Kiowa was dead.” (170 O’Brien) When the soldiers the next day had to go find Kiowa’s body, they say that the muck in this field was up to their hips at some points. The setting in this part of the book was crucial because it was where Kiowa was killed and where they found his body. They found Kiowa’s body in the much and his face and his body was torn up from all of the damage from the weather and the field. This is a place where the narrator was traumatized by his friend getting killed, and the way he described it was so picture perfect that the image doesn’t leave my mind.

In The Things They Carried, the Night Life played a big role in many of the soldiers daily lives considering the conditions they were in. Some of the soldiers that were stationed at this camp had to go out during the night and patrol the area. Some of the soldiers described it as “you’d shake your head and blink, except you couldn’t even tell you were blinking, the blackness didn’t change.” (141) The darkness would start to drive the soldiers crazy, especially Rat Kiley. Rat Kiley felt that the bugs were “whispering his name” (142.) Because you couldn’t see anything, all you could use was you hearing, touch, and smell. The night life was so quiet that anything that moved, or made a noise was easily spotted. The darkness eventually got to Rat Kiley and he shot himself in the foot so he could go home and get away from the night life. This is what some of the soldiers had to go through every day. They would sleep during the daylight hours and then wake up at dusk to put their gear on and get ready to go out into the night life. The soldiers would have to walk so close together that they would be touching so they wouldn’t get lost. What the soldiers went through in this story was traumatizing and this was their daily lives.

In the book The Things They Carried the main character is back to the famous field where his friend, Kiowa, had passed away. He was visiting with his daughter, Kathleen, and he took her to the field to show her where everything had happened. The narrator said that “the field was still there, though not as I remembered it. Much smaller.” (115) The narrator brought with him something special that he kept for twenty years, it was Kiowa’s moccasins that they found when they found his body. When the narrator got to the field he started thinking to himself “I wonder if it was all a mistake. Everything was too ordinary. A quiet sunny day, and the field was no the field I remembered.” (117) The field that he remembered was not the field he was at. He remembered a war zone, he remembered muck up to his thighs trying to find his friend Kiowa. Not the quiet, peaceful, green grass field he was standing on. He found a little river, this river was where they found Kiowa’s body and he unwrapped the small cloth and took out Kiowa’s moccasins. The narrator took the moccasins and buried them into the river to have the memory of Kiowa in this field where he was killed. This place was a terrifying but special place to the narrator. He lost his best friend here and was involved in an explosion, but when he went back to visit, it meant a lot to him. This field was a big part of his life and where he spent a lot of his time defending his country.

The book The Things They Carried, the setting effected the way the story was told because where everything took place for the soldiers in this book had a meaningful significance to them. They lost one of their own due to an explosion, they had to go through the night life where they couldn’t see anything, and when one of them goes back to the field, its different from what they remembered. They have sad, scary memories from these places and they play a big role in their life, even in their modern day life.