

Adrian Glasmyre

Dr. Pettice

DCOM 283

31 January 2020

Short Narrative Essay #1

In middle school, my eighth-grade history class took a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit each of the monuments. As a 13-year-old bumbling around Washington D.C. in a neon t-shirt, I remember being too concerned with wondering who was going to sit with me on the bus ride back to actually engage in the important history around me. Unfortunately, I found myself unable to connect with a lot of the memorials and unable to even understand them. Specifically, I had a hard time comprehending the Vietnam War memorial. Visually, the monument shocked me, as the thousands of names of soldiers who had died in the war loomed over my four-foot nine body. Although the height of the memorial impacted me, I was also confused about why these people had to die. We still hadn't learned about the Vietnam War at that point in my history class, and I never watched any movies or read any books about Vietnam. Walking through the Vietnam War memorial allowed me to understand some of the impacts of the war; however, it was hard for me to understand the history behind it.

By the next year, my history class became more intense, as we began moving along the American history timeline, this time learning more about the 20th century. My teacher took an alternative route to teach us about the Vietnam War, by not only relaying the critical dates and names, but also exposing us to songs, movies, books, and art from that period. Through this media, I was able to understand the Vietnam War a little more, realizing the turbulence and anguish that came with it. My freshman year history class made me recognize for the first time

that history and wars were not black and white; wars weren't only about who won and who lost. I began to understand the stories behind the war and how people's lives were impacted by it.

In addition to my ninth-grade history class, reading "The Things They Carried" has only deepened my appreciation and understanding of the stories that came out of the Vietnam War. Although it took me some time to adjust to the fictitious aspect of his stories, I was able to grasp why it was so crucial for O'Brien's stories to be based in fiction, since it was a way for him to memorialize his fellow soldiers in the war. Each of his short stories transported me to Vietnam and helped me understand why the soldiers carried the things they did. Specifically, reading "On Rainy River" resonated with me and I was able to relate to O'Brien in those moments when he was afraid of going to the war. His storytelling immersed me throughout the book, and I felt I gained a lot of insight into life as a soldier in the Vietnam War through the stories he told about himself and the other men in his platoon.

Overall, reading stories and consuming media from a different type has always helped me understand that time better. I feel that reading or hearing stories allows me to connect and empathize with the storyteller more. I usually end up feeling more invested when history is relayed to me through a story. Because of hearing these stories, I think the Vietnam War memorial would leave a more significant impact on me now since I never heard any stories about the war before visiting the monument in eighth grade. It was hard for me to connect with the history since I failed to understand why the war happened in the first place. However, reading stories allowed me to realize that even the soldiers in the war were having a hard time understanding why they were sent to war. Gaining this insight allowed me to empathize and connect with the soldiers who served in the war and whose names are on the memorial.