“The Things They Carried”
1. Throughout the chapter, take some notes on what the major characters carry and why they carry these things.
2. What kind of person is Martha? How does Jimmy imagine her? Note the brief allusions to other literature in the description of Martha (she’s an English major)—what’s the significance of these?
4. Look closely at pp. 13 to the section break on p. 15. How does O’Brien change focus on what the soldiers are carrying? How do the last few sentences of this section add to the “weight” of things?
5. What would you say the mood of this story is (try to pick a word or a few words) and why? Go past words like “depressing” or “sad”—try to tie the emotional feeling to something more ingrained in the story’s action. Reread the beginning and the end of the story, and look back at the section on pp. 13–15 for some ideas.

“Love”
6. What kind of person is Jimmy Cross? What kind of person is Martha?
7. What do you make of the Bonnie and Clyde allusion here? (It’s the movie they saw on their date—if you don’t know the story, look it up)
8. What do you make of Jimmy Cross’s relationship with Martha? What does he mean when he says, “It doesn’t matter…I love her” (p. 28)
9. What does the ending mean? (there are more than one right answer)

“Spin”
10. What are some of the multiple meanings of the word “spin” as O’Brien uses it and in other contexts?
11. Note the first-person aside by O’Brien on p. 31 (“I’m forty-three…”). What is the significance of this paragraph? Note that this sentence or variations of it appear later in the story (and throughout the book).
12. This story is really a series of fragments. Note things you don’t completely understand. You may understand them after reading the rest of the book.

“Escape” and “On the Rainy River”
13. Compare the two stories, one fiction and one non-fiction, and make a list of differences and similarities. Why might he have changed some things?
14. Define the struggle inside Tim O’Brien in “Rainy River.” What are some of the emotions he feels. Use specific quotations.
15. What does he mean when he says, “It was a moral split” (42)? An older edition of this story had this sentence as “It was a type of schizophrenia, a moral split.”
16. Interpret the last line of “Rainy River”: “I was a coward. I went to the war.” How does the meaning of “coward” change here?

“How to Tell a True War Story”

17. Write down elements of what O’Brien considers a “true” war story.
18. Curt Lemon’s death is described multiple times in this story. Note the differences among the descriptions of his death in each instance.
19. What does O’Brien mean by “true”? What is the difference between literal truth (what actually happened) and what he considers “truth”?
20. What do you make of the last section where O’Brien wants to call the old woman a “cooze”?
21. Do you feel cheated at the end of this story when he implies that it’s all fiction?

“The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong”

22. Make two lists: (1) stereotypical characteristics of a traditional man; (2) stereotypical characteristics of a traditional woman.
23. How does Mary Anne slowly evolve from the beginning of the story to the end? Pick three passages where you notice a distinct change in character.
24. How does Mark Fossie slowly evolve? Again, pick three passages.
25. Who are the Greenies? What do they represent?
26. How would you describe how Mary Anne turns out in the end of the story?
27. Why doesn’t Mitchell Sanders like the way this story is told? What is ironic about his criticisms given Tim O’Brien’s methods of telling a story?
28. How is “Sweetheart” a “true war story” according to O’Brien?

“The Man I Killed” and “Ambush” and Hardy poem “The Man He Killed”

29. What is the ultimate sentiment of Hardy’s poem? Relate to the O’Brien stories.
30. In “The Man I Killed,” how does the narrator empathize with the dead VC soldier? What kind of man does the narrator imagine the dead man was? Be specific. Who does the dead man remind you of?
31. How is the story different in “Ambush”? Why do you think O’Brien retells the story differently?
32. What is the significance of the last line of “Ambush”? What happens here?

“Speaking of Courage,” “Notes,” and “In the Field”

33. Look closely at the last section of “Notes” (153–54). What interpretationS do you make of the last sentences? How do your interpretations play out in “In the Field”? Or, to approach the same question from another angle, why does Tim O’Brien retell the story the way he does in “In the Field”?
“Style,” “Church,” “Field Trip” and “The Things They Didn’t Know” (from *Going After Cacciato*)

34. The three stories show how the soldiers related to the Vietnamese people. What do we see through the soldiers’ eyes? What do we not see? Are you left with questions? What are they?

35. In “Field Trip,” how does Tim describe the field where Kiowa died on his return to Vietnam? How does he come to peace with it?

36. After you finish “Field Trip” and answer question 2, take a step back from the story and read the ending again. Why might the Vietnamese man be mad (as Kathleen notices)? What is the field in actuality? If the man is actually mad, how does this change the meaning of the story?

37. In the excerpt from *Going After Cacciato*, why do think there are so many questions asked?

“The Lives of the Dead”

38. In the first few lines of the story and throughout the story, what phrases repeat from earlier in the book?

39. What does O’Brien note about the nature of stories in the section on pp. 218-219?

40. Why does he keep retelling the story of Linda to himself?

41. Why does Rat Kiley keep retelling the story of Curt Lemon on Halloween?

42. What does Linda say about herself not being dead? What does she compare herself to?

43. Why does ice-skating work as an image in this story? Look closely and relate it to other images in this book. What new meaning is given to this image?