

Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" – the rules

An incomplete list.

A true war story:

Is never moral

Shows no virtue

Is absolutely and uncompromisingly allied to obscenity and evil

Does not allow you to feel uplifted

Shows no rectitude (correctness of behavior)

Embarrasses you

Cannot be believed (the crazy stuff is true, the normal stuff isn't)

Seems never to end

Does not generalize

Does not indulge in abstraction or analysis

Is contradictory

Makes you ask questions (like, "Is it true?")

Is never about the war