

Truths of War Fiction

After reading Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and watching Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, we've been over the arguments of what defines "truth": factual data, individual perspectives, shared experiences, universal dictums, beliefs, etc. etc. Accepting that the definition of truth is complex, often contradictory, and downright shifty, come up with two "truths" of war you can explain and defend as portrayed in all three of the works. (The tricky part here is writing the truths out-the language has to be both limiting and malleable.) Once you have satisfactorily defined and proved the existence of your truths, defend a choice of which *style* BEST depicts each truth. (This is the hard part – you have to make a value judgement based on your understanding of each artist's style and how that style works to tell the truths.) Also contrast from the other two styles, explaining why they do not work as well at presenting your truths.

Let's break it down.

1. Read/watch and understand *Catch 22*, *The Things They Carried*, and *Apocalypse Now*.
2. Clearly define two truths of war that apply to all three works. Much of this work will be done in class (So put your cell phones away and no prom talk!).
3. Prove that both of your truths exist in all three works.
4. Explore the stylistic choices made by each artist. For example, literature of the absurd, black comedy, satire and post-modernism all apply to Heller/ O'Brien's style could be called "faction," a constant blend of fictional story telling with a first person auto-biographical "factual" perspective. He also is a post-modernist, playing with traditional conventions of narration and characterization in order to subvert the reader's expectations and understanding of what is true. Coppola's writing/filming style has much to do with setting a dark, surreal apocalyptic mood using lighting and sound. He also uses the first person narration with Captain Willard's voice-over to make sense of the non-sense which surrounds him, and to provide understanding of Colonel Kurtz. There is much visual symbolism in the film.
5. Choose which style BEST represents each truth. You may use the same style for each truth or two different styles, one for each truth. Explain why the style you have chosen is the BEST: this requires a clear understanding of the style you have chosen as well as a contrasting from the other two styles and how they are not as good as the best style.

The structure of the paper may look like this:

- I. Introduction of war fiction and the truths one might find. Thesis statement of existence of two truths and which style(s) best represent them.
- II. Truth number one is explained and its existence in all three works is proved via a single example from each work. The final example is used to transition to which style BEST represents the truth. (Will likely be more than one paragraph.)
- III. Truth number two is explained and its existence in all three works is proved via a single example from each work. The final example is used to transition to which style BEST represents the truth. (Will likely be more than one paragraph.) (If you choose to use the same style for both truths you can organize this differently.)
- IV. Conclusion (The contrast of the other two styles can occur here.)