

## WRITTEN TASK 1 RATIONALE FORM

Session: **May 2019**

Subject: **English Language and Literature** Level: **Higher**

Part and option to which the task is linked: Part 3: Texts and Contexts

Type of text: Additional chapter

### **Rationale:**

This task links to Part 3 (Text and Contexts), and is an additional chapter supplementing Tim O'Brien's 'The Things They Carried'. It follows the chapter 'Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong', where the narrator, Tim O'Brien, is told a story by his friend Rat about a soldier who brought his girlfriend, Mary Anne Bell, over to the Vietnam War. She undergoes significant development as a dynamic character, struggling to maintain her innocence before succumbing to the savagery of war. Her transformation and conflict is paramount, yet its process and the involvement of the Greenies - US Special Forces - is ambiguous in the original text, which is why I chose to examine this arc. Titled 'Màu Xanh Lá', which means 'green' in Vietnamese, this chapter memorialises the grotesque satisfaction Mary Anne and the Greenies find in brutality and terror. The task enhances the characterisation of existing characters, demonstrating an understanding of themes crafted in the original text, such as the paradoxical nature of war, the power war has to change an individual, and the difficulty of separating truth from memory.

Core elements of O'Brien's style are emulated through use of sensory imagery and structural shifts. Auditory imagery - "thunder crashed like gunfire" - conjures a vivid, immersive experience of war, compelling readers to weigh war's beauty against its brutality. The narrative voice shifts frequently from third person omniscient to second person, challenging readers to redefine the inextricable relationship between subjective truth and recollection. Polysyndeton and anaphora mimic the overwhelming oppression of war on an individual's physical and psychological state, eliciting a visceral response from the reader, furthering O'Brien's intention of prioritising an audience's emotional response over truth. Temporal shifts alternate from the events in the story to O'Brien hearing the story, demonstrating how storytelling dilutes the relationship between different types of truth.

Word Count: 298

## Màu Xanh Lá

“It doesn’t end there,” Rat insisted, as Mitchell Sanders let out a sigh of exasperation. “Out there, man, you *hear* things.” It went unspoken that sometimes there was nothing to hear, nothing to see, nothing to do except sit and feel the whole war pressing in around you.

“Go on, then.”

One of the Greenies told him the rest, Rat said. Xavier Moore, Green Beret - real close-knit group, that squad of six. They were detached from the war, in the strange way a hand with pins and needles does not feel your own, even though you know it to be connected to your body. They were rocks worn smooth in the crashing stream of conflict; the endgame of war seemed to flow around them, just as effortlessly as they flowed through the mountains that unfolded into the night.

There came a time for Xavier, the point of no return; where you became more of the land you were walking on than your own land oceans away. Where the red-orange dirt became ingrained into your nail beds, the cloying damp of fog a better blanket than army provisions could ever offer. Where you uncovered the far side of yourself, the side that hummed alongside swarms of bugs in the muggy air, the side that sang with the brutal pleasure of snapping bone, the side that cried out to the sky as thunder crashed like gunfire over the rolling hills, flayed raw with pleasure and adrenaline.

Evasion, deception, sabotage - that was their game, and they played it well. They were a well oiled machine, a pack of blood brother wolves, noiseless in the undergrowth, stopping, crouching, waiting as one. They shared supplies, the electrifying mix of anticipation and boredom, their very breath as they paused, watching, and the madness too. They shared with no one but themselves.

Except one other.

The Greenies simply watched from a distance. Xavier examined Mary Anne’s strawberry ice-cream complexion, her soft skin and round edges. He watched her learn to plug bullet wounds, fire an M-16; he watched her balmy disposition harden into tempered steel. He slowly

catalogued the changes in the way she held herself, in her voice: she became corded with elastic tension, a restless energy bubbling beneath her surface. Her bluebell eyes were always pinned to the jungle.

Eventually, she found enough nerve to steal over barefoot to their hootch, silent as a shadow and chiaroscuro, pale moonlight coruscating off her blonde hair as she spread her toes in the dirt. Quiet rustles of night filtered in through the door. Mike Kirby broke the silence.

“What d’you need, tiger?” He asked with only a trace of scepticism.

Mary Anne’s rosy apple cheeks lifted in a half smile.

“I’d like to learn,” she answered, in that high, clear voice, her blue eyes burning into each of them. Xavier glanced at Kirby, who shrugged.

“Chuck her some gear.”

It was here, Rat said, that the Greenies’ story became classified information, even the missions Mary Anne had gone on.

I remember Kiowa snorting, and Sanders shaking his head.

“What a load of steaming bull.”

She didn’t know the danger was real. Or if she did, she didn’t care. Xavier would be lying there, fatigues wet with leaf mulch as tracer rounds streaked by, luminescent scarlet and deadly beautiful. He clocked the glimmer of delight in her eyes as the shooting reverberated in their eardrums, noted the flicker of her hands as they reached up to echo the paths of the bullets, fingers dancing carefree through the air as though to let a butterfly land on her finger.

They smelled the mound of bodies before they saw them. Kirby, who had seen worse, leant against a tree, but Mary Anne crept closer, drawn by morbid fascination like a moth to flame. What little light filtering in through the canopy threw the corpses into sharp relief. She drank in their hollow faces with longing: the empty eye sockets, the stretched sallow skin, the corroded chest cavities. A macabre museum goer, guileless in her wonderment, predatory in her walk.

Mary Anne stalked the perimeter before crouching abruptly, metal flashing. A tilt of a chin, followed by the thick, damp *snick* of blade through flesh. A piece of copper wire materialised from her pocket, as if she had been waiting to use it for this exact moment. The tongue pulsed in the starlight, a grotesque charm for her brand new necklace. She threaded her needle through the muscle, fingers deft, oozing crimson under her nails. She swept her mane of

hair off her neck, matted with blood and dirt, and handed the wire to Xavier, bearing her nape. He fumbled before twisting the ends together.

“Nice pearls,” said Kirby.

Mary Anne smiled, and Xavier’s heart left his ribcage, for she had whipped around in all her charcoal smeared glory, and all he could see were the glowing pearly whites of her teeth, her eyes chips of ice. He knew her face echoed his. There was hunger wrought in every line of her body. Wearing a human tongue was a vivid reminder of the *now*, of being alive, of the dark and dirt and death pumping inside you. Eyes as wild as her hair, Mary Anne turned heel and marched back into the forest.

“Let’s go find some more,” she called, and their smiles paralleled hers as they embarked on their insatiable quest for danger. They made it a ritual. Find a body, add another charm to the necklace. They revelled in the hunt, their wolf pack complete, howling at the moon - baying for blood.

And then, they were lost to the jungle. They slid through shadows, crossing beyond the realms of the living, unearthly - they were more a part of Nam than they were human.

“...They all went gook,” Sanders said, astonished. “Rat, you was hanging around with a bunch of *crazies*.”

Rat just laughed.

“That’s Nam for you, man.” He gave an uncharacteristic giggle. “It does things to your head.”

Word Count: 1000

## Works Cited

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York, Mariner Books, 2009.