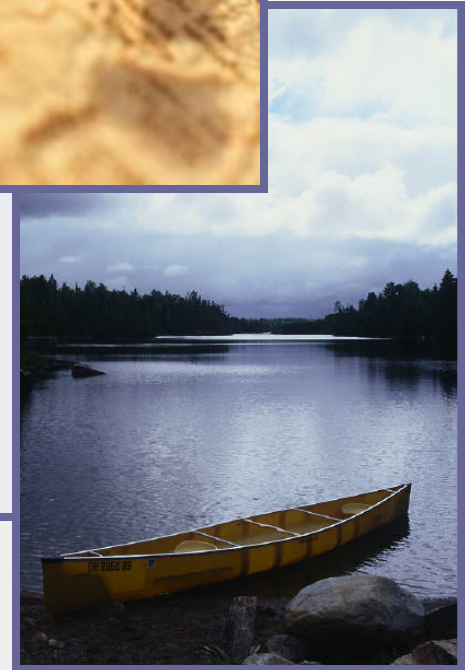


# On the Rainy River

FICTION SELECTION  
Unit 4, Part 2, Grade 10



Preparing to Read

# Connect to Your Life

In this story, a young man must decide whether to fight in a war he opposes.

- Under what conditions would you be willing to fight in a war?
- Under what conditions would you be unwilling to fight?



## Preparing to Read

# Build Background

- The Vietnam War (1957-1975) was one of the most controversial military conflicts in the history of the United States.
- The U.S. entered the war in 1964 in hopes of preventing the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia.



## Preparing to Read

# Build Background

During the course of the war, nearly 3 million Americans were sent overseas to defend the South Vietnamese government against a takeover by Communist North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, a South Vietnamese Communist rebel force.



## Preparing to Read

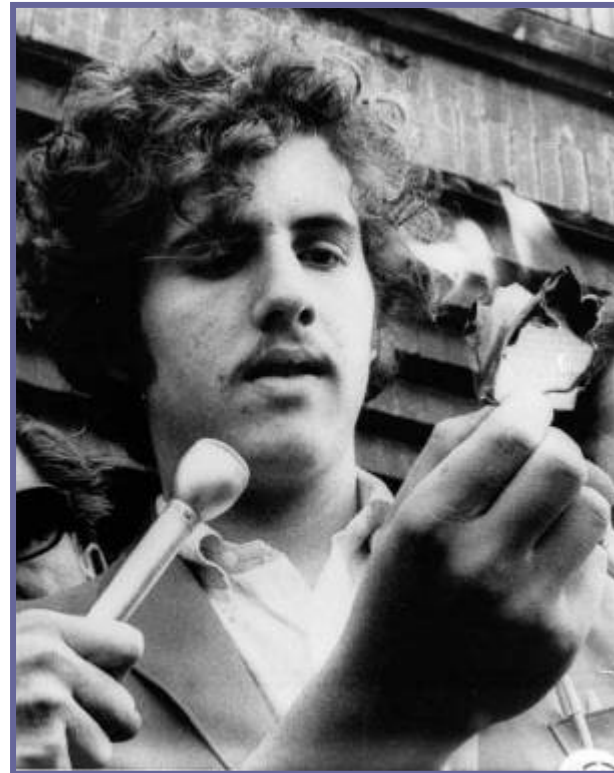
# Build Background

- During the war, nearly 2 million men were drafted into the military.
- Those who were drafted but who opposed the war faced a difficult decision:
  - risk their lives in a foreign war they couldn't justify.
  - risk imprisonment at home by refusing to serve.

## Preparing to Read

# Build Background

- Some burned their draft cards as a form of protest.
- Others fled the country, most often by crossing the border into Canada.



## Preparing to Read

# Words to Know

- acquiescence
- consensus
- fathom
- impassive
- imperative
- platitude
- preoccupied
- pretense
- reticence
- vigil

## Preparing to Read

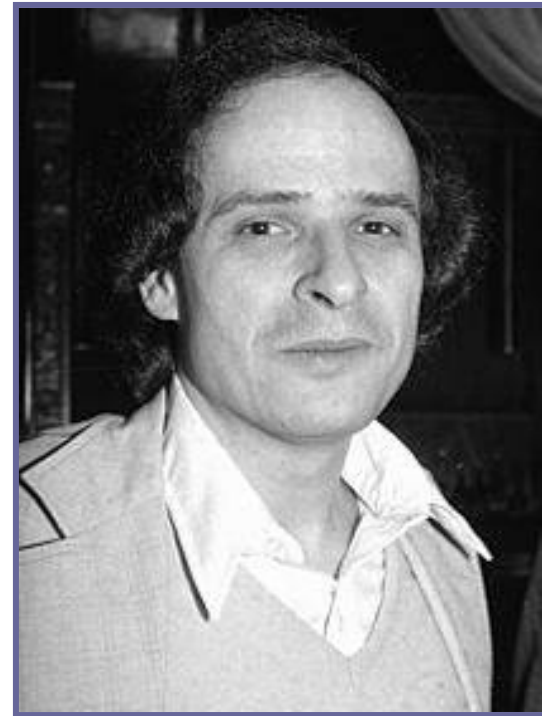
# Focus Your Reading

- “On the Rainy River” is told from the **first-person point of view**.
- The **narrator** is a **character** in the story and so participates in the events he recounts.
  - Readers see things through the narrator’s eyes.
- His comments and descriptions convey the difficulty of the momentous decision he faces.

## Preparing to Read

# Focus Your Reading

- In this story, the author blurs the line between fact and fiction by calling his narrator “Tim O’Brien.”
  - The story, however, is work of fiction.
- As you read, notice how O’Brien’s use of the first-person point of view affects your feelings about the narrator.



## Preparing to Read

# Focus Your Reading

- Good readers not only receive information, but they also **make judgments** about it.
- As you read this story, you will receive considerable information about the narrator and the decision he faces.
  - To make a judgment about a character's decision, you need to think about standards, or criteria for judging.

# Preparing to Read

## Focus Your Reading

In a chart, note the reasons the narrator puts forward in support of each option facing him and your judgment of his options and of his ultimate decision.



Going to  
Vietnam

Narrator's Views

My Judgment and Reasons:

Going to  
Canada



Narrator's Views

My Judgment and Reasons:

Download this graphic organizer at  
[www.curriculumcompanion.org](http://www.curriculumcompanion.org)

# Reading and Analyzing **Active Reading**

## Making Judgments

- Think about alternatives the narrator has – from prison to serving as a noncombatant medic.
- Make judgments about these alternatives.



# Reading and Analyzing Literary Analysis

## First-person point of view

- The hallmark of first-person narration is the pronoun *I*.
- Notice the distinction between the narrator and the author.
  - » The narrator is a *fictional* character through whose eyes we see all action and receive all information.
  - » Tim O'Brien, the author, has blurred the line between fact and fiction by naming his narrator after himself.



# Reading and Analyzing **Literary Analysis**

## First-Person Point of View

- So far, this story has essentially been a long description of the narrator's thoughts and action.
- Consider how point of view affects a story's style and voice.
  - » How would this story be different if it were told from a third-person point of view?

Reading and Analyzing

# Reading Skills and Strategies

## Questioning

- Ask questions about the narrator's actions and anything else that piques your interest.
- Look for answers to these questions as you read.



# Reading and Analyzing Literary Analysis

## Symbolism

- **Symbols** are images that stand for broad ideas or concepts.
- Think about what the meat-packing plant represents in the story.



# Reading and Analyzing Literary Analysis

## Setting

- Contrast the two settings of the story:
  - » the narrator's hometown described on page 631.
  - » the area around Rainy River, on the Canadian River.
- What images and references paint a picture of the town and the narrator's life there?
- Why is it important for you to have a picture of this town in your mind when you think about the remote Rainy River area?

# Reading and Analyzing **Literary Analysis**

- First-Person Point of View
  - What would be the impact on the story if it had been told by Elroy Berdahl?
  - What insights would readers have lost?
  - What insights might be added?
- Character
  - Summarize the traits of Elroy Berdahl that you have observed.

# Reading and Analyzing Reading Skills and Strategies

## Comparing

- Compare the narrator's behavior and personality with Elroy's.
  - » What differences exist between the characters?
  - » What similarities?



# Reading and Analyzing

## Active Reading

### Making Judgments

- What do you think about the narrator's decision to leave his job and go to the Rainy River?



# Reading and Analyzing Literary Analysis

## Character

- What does the reader learn about the narrator's personality from the thoughts and descriptions of the fishing trip?
- Do you think the narrator seems critical of himself?
  - » If so, how?



# Reading and Analyzing Reading Skills and Strategies

## Clarifying

- Analyze the narrator’s hallucination and the “crowd” of onlookers.
- What does the crowd seem to represent?
- What does it foreshadow about the narrator’s decision?



# Reading and Analyzing **Literary Analysis**

## Description

- Think about the individual images and their overall effect.
- Notice the collage effect of this vision.
- How do the details help the reader see into the narrator's mind?
- How does the vision affect the narrator?

# Reading and Analyzing Active Reading

## Making Judgments

- What are your judgments about the narrator's decision?
- Review your original views of the narrator's options.
- Has anything in the story helped to change your mind about the narrator's options?



# Reading and Analyzing Literary Analysis

## Theme

- A story's **theme** is its central idea of message.
  - » What is the theme of this story?
- How does the poem by Adrienne Rich help you imagine the narrator's dilemma?
  - » Does it have a similar theme?

