

Deer Hunter Essay

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Bailey


AP Language and Composition


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Life and Death

During the course of a war, soldiers become witnesses to various atrocities that can change their perspective. Within their experiences of the horrors of war lies a certain truth and reality about life. The truth of war, depicted in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, is that although war involves death and destruction, it is also inexplicably linked to life. In the film, Cimino portrays the lives of the steel mill workers Michael, Nick, and Steven as they go to war. As the war progresses, these three men find themselves fighting in a war that is neither honorable nor glorious – two factors that change their understanding of the things that are important in life. Through Michael's estrangement from society and its social values such as harmony and civility, he is able to gain a greater awareness and insight of the things that he no longer has because of the war. In the film, Cimino reflects O'Brien's guideline in *The Things They Carried* that:


“To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. At its core, perhaps, war is just another name for death, and yet any soldier will tell you, if he tells you the truth, that proximity to death brings with it a corresponding proximity to lifeIn the midst of evil you want to be a good man. You want decency. You want justice and courtesy and human concord, things you never knew you wanted. There is a kind of largeness to it, a kind of godliness. Though it's odd, you're never more alive than when you're almost dead. You recognize what's



valuable. Freshly, as if for the first time, you love what's best in yourself and in the world, all that might be lost."  4 (O'Brien 87-88).




As Michael experiences a war that threatens to take everything  5 from him, he recognizes the value of his experiences and of human decency.

Cimino's portrayal of the group of friends follows O'Brien's guideline that "To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace" (87-88). He shows the inherent complexity of war through the three friends' differing reactions to their experiences during the war. Through his illustration of Michael and Nick's interaction at the hospital, Cimino proves that war cannot be generalized as it "depends primarily on individual acts of will"  6 (p. 16). When Michael visits Steven at the hospital, he discovers that Steven has lost his feet and therefore cannot wear his socks. After a short conversation, Michael tries to convince Steven to come home. To dissuade Michael from forcing him to return home, Steven tells him that he fears returning home because he does not "fit". After Michael persists in his endeavor, Steven tells him to "do as his heart tells him" (Cimino). Cimino shows that despite encountering a similar feeling of distance after the war, Michael returns home and attempts to bring both Nick and Steven home as well. In doing so, he demonstrates that the ultimate outcome of the war truly depends on the individual's actions, and that war  7 affects people in very different ways. For Michael and Steven, the war is not only about death and ruin but it is also about friendship, loyalty, and understanding.

Through his depiction of the interactions of Michael, Nick, and Steven as they are taken as prisoners of war by the North Vietnamese soldiers, Cimino supports O'Brien's statement that in "the midst of evil you want to be a good man" (87-88). Before Michael goes to war, he refuses to give boots or thermal socks to Stan, and shoots a deer with "one shot" without the

others. When Michael, Nick, and Steven are taken captive as prisoners of war, however, Michael exhibits a different behavior. Hearing  8 nds of gunshots above him, he quickly realizes that their captors are forcing the prisoners to play Russian roulette and gambling on the results. Steven quickly becomes distraught and he begins to cry as he awaits the inevitable.

Knowing  9 hey will be soon forced to play the game by their captors, Michael tries to reassure Steven.  10 As “the prisoners shriek and the bettors torment them sadistically” (Dempsey 11), Michael tells him to “calm down” and that the situation is okay (Cimino). Michael demonstrates that despite being surrounded by the evils of war, he wishes to be a good man. He recognizes this good quality in himself, and later saves Steven two times – from the water pit after escaping their capture by North Vietnamese soldiers, and from the river after Steven falls from the helicopter.

When Michael discovers Stan pointing a revolver at Axel, he exemplifies O’Brien’s guideline that “You want decency. You want justice and courtesy and human concord, things you never knew you wanted” (87-88). Putting a single bullet in the revolver, Michael tells Stan that he has a game for  11 o “teach Stan a lesson about fooling around with guns” (Callenbach 21), Michael points the revolver at Stan’s head and fires a single shot as Stan fearfully cries beneath him (Cimino). For Stan and Axel, Michael’s sudden and severe reaction comes as a surprise. Michael’s reaction can be  12 ed by his desire for justice and humanity. Michael has learned to recognize the value of life and camaraderie because of his proximity to death during the war. After playing Russian roulette with Nick and experiencing its dangerous consequences, Michael can no longer tolerate seeing others play with guns. From Michael’s perspective, Stan represents the injustice and lack of human decency that Michael has learned to despise.  13 As a consequence of the war, Michael wants justice. Cimino illustrates the contrast

between the behavior of Michael, who has experienced the horrors of war, and the behavior of his friends.

The portrayal of Nick at the Russian roulette table supports O'Brien's belief that "Freshly, as if for the first time, you love what's best in yourself and in the world, all that might be lost" (87-88). As Michael continues his pursuit of Nick, he offers the Frenchman money in exchange for information regarding Nick's whereabouts. He discovers Nick playing a game of Russian roulette with gamblers betting on the outcome, explaining the source of the money that Nick has been purportedly sending to Steven. When he confronts Nick, he discovers that he, like the other "heroin-addicted 'champions'" (Dempsey 11), has become completely amnesic, and that he has no recollection of Michael or his life before the war. As Michael begins to play, asking Nick "Is this what you want?", he tells Nick that he loves him before pulling the trigger (Cimino). This shows that at the threshold of life, Michael recognizes his love for Nick. To show Nick that he cares, Michael is willing to engage Nick in a dangerous game of life and death. As a result of the war, Michael acknowledges 14 comes aware of his emotional connection with Nick. Although Nick finally dies playing Russian roulette, he remembers Michael in the moment before he shoots himself, recalling Michael's phrase "one shot" (Cimino).

The stories told by Cimino in *The Deer Hunter* and those of O'Brien in *The Things They Carried* both illustrate the complexity of war and its consequences on the individual. War often involves a great deal of trauma for those who have experienced it firsthand. However, war cannot be defined by the death of soldiers. It does not merely inflict destruction on the lives of those who fight in it, but it has the potential to destroy the lives of many others as well. For those who fight in war or find themselves in close proximity to those who fought in war, war has

lasting effects. It brings about great changes in people, and allows them to understand the value of life. In war, soldiers realize the things that they value the most and that they might lose, and the common soldier understands this quality of war to be the truth. The character Michael in *The Deer Hunter* exemplifies this to the greatest degree, and realizes that war is not merely about death but about friendship, and that one shot can make the greatest difference between life and death. Through their experiences of the war, Michael and Steven learn to value their friendship and live.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

82/100

PAGE 1



Comment 1

vague it-- what is linked?



Comment 2

good sentence



Comment 3

avoid using things-- be clear

PAGE 2



Comment 4

omit quotation marks in block format



Comment 5

use more specific idea and words



Comment 6

critical source must come at end of paragraph-- after you have detailed the scene and established your support of the assertion



Comment 7

the guideline is so vague that you are trying to support- specify it and add your understanding of it

PAGE 3



Comment 8

good sentence



Comment 9

good



Comment 10

establish argument and support of a "good man" more



Comment 11

again-- place critical source at end of argument



Comment 12

passive



Comment 13

good analysis here

PAGE 4



Comment 14

need argument



Comment 15

good analysis-- now add more support of argument and always end on your own ideas (not on a quote)



Comment 16

some good ideas overall but some paragraphs need reordering and better use of critical source quotes to support argument

PAGE 5



Comment 17

nice conclusion

PAGE 6

EXPOSITION (20%)

0 / 5

The text sets up a story by introducing the event/conflict, characters and setting.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creatively engages the reader by setting out a well-developed conflict, situation, or observation. The text establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or complex characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text engages and orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or well-developed characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one point of view and introduces a narrator and/or developed characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a setting with a vague conflict, situation, or observation with an unclear point of view. It introduces a narrator and/or underdeveloped characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text provides a setting that is unclear with a vague conflict, situation, or observation. It has an unclear point of view and underdeveloped narrator and/or characters.

DEVELOPMENT (20%)

0 / 5

The story is developed using dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text demonstrates sophisticated narrative techniques, such as engaging dialogue, artistic pacing, vivid description, complex reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text demonstrates deliberate use of narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, reflection, that illustrate events and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses some narrative techniques, such as dialogue or description that merely retells events and/or experiences.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks narrative techniques and merely retells events and/or experiences.

ORGANIZATION (20%)

0 / 5

The text follows a logical sequence of events.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creates a seamless progression of experiences or events using multiple techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
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SKILLED (4)	The text creates a smooth progression of experiences or events using a variety of techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text creates a logical progression of experiences or events using some techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text creates a sequence or progression of experiences or events.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks a sequence or progression of experiences or events or presents an illogical sequence of events.

STYLE (20%)

0 / 5

The text uses sensory language and details to create a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text uses eloquent words and phrases, showing details and rich sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text uses precise words and phrases, showing details and controlled sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses words and phrases and telling details to convey experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text merely tells about experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

CONCLUSION (20%)

0 / 5

The text provides a conclusion that follows from the course of the narrative. The conclusion provides a reflection on or resolution of the events.

EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text moves to a conclusion that artfully follows from and thoughtfully reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
SKILLED (4)	The text builds to a conclusion that logically follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
INADEQUATE	The text may provide a conclusion to the events of the narrative.

