



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2010 Volume II: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

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## **The Things We Carry: Understanding Grief and Loss through a Memorial Ceremony, the Elegy, and the List Poem**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.02.07

by Judith J. Katz

This unit is devoted to an issue that I find is critically missing from our students' education: how to deal with grief. The day I began writing this unit, a crisis committee was called in our urban high school because there had been a shoot-out over the weekend in which three teenagers were injured and one died. None was a student at my school, but all had close friends there. Students were crying, afraid to stay in school and afraid to go home.

I am hard-pressed to find a class in which more than 25 percent of the students have not experienced violence, death, or significant loss first- or secondhand this year alone. How do students, children, and the adults they look to for guidance and stability learn to incorporate such experiences into their lives? I think there is something to be learned from the process of grieving that requires language to examine, interpret, express, and in the end to decide what things you will let go of and what things you will carry away from grieving. I don't think writing is the cure, but I do think that reading and writing can change the way we see ourselves and each other.

(Recommended for Creative Writing, grade 10)

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