Tim O’Brien is the author of the novel *The Things They Carried*. This book is about his experiences in Vietnam, and his thoughts on war and storytelling. O’Brien says that he does not look at his writing as therapy but it has helped him cope with the lasting effects of the war. Much like Tim, Gregory Van Maanen uses his artistic talent as an outlet for his thoughts and feelings about the war in Vietnam. The events experienced in the war by both of these men were unforgettable and therefore needed to be expressed in some way. Whether or not their work is viewed as therapy, it has allowed them to objectify their war experiences.

*The Things They Carried* is a memoir of O’Brien’s life in Vietnam and his reflections on what happened. O’Brien saw everything from the killing of the enemy to his own comrade drowning in muck. These experiences are ones that have scarred him for life. Many people involved in Vietnam were unable to cope with the events they witnessed, but fortunately for O’Brien, he was able to find something that acted as an outlet for his thoughts. Writing his war stories allows him to share his experience with others and reflect upon the emotions that each event left him.

Gregory Van Maanen lets his feelings about war out through painting. His exhibit at The Memorial Art Gallery is a collection of paintings that express the atrocities of war. The paintings contain common symbols such as skulls, eyes, and mouths with sharp teeth. The paintings are similar in the fact that they are confusing and express dark emotions. One can tell that Van Maanen must have been thinking of disturbing events while painting these works because the overall tone is dismal. The eyes of the skulls are swirled giving them a lost look, and their mouths are open with sharp teeth, perhaps symbolizing how one can be eaten alive by the war. In addition, there are shapes in each painting that appear to be eyes. This could represent the scrutiny under which soldiers found themselves once they returned from the war. Overall his work expresses feelings of anger and sadness that lingers still from the Vietnam war.

During his interview Dr. Shay* tries to stress the point that the veterans are the ones with the valuable information. They know what the war experience is like, and how its effects can be lessened. He says that the most important rule to follow is to keep people together. He says that soldiers should be trained together, sent into danger together, and brought home together. This, he thinks, will lessen the psychological damage caused by war.

War is a culmination of extreme experiences and emotions, all condensed into a short period of time. Another name for the men that endure this could be put simply as disposable heroes. They put their life on the line, constantly witnessing death, and then expected to go back to their life at home as if nothing ever happened. The reality is that this is not possible. The soldiers need to let out their feelings in one way or another or else they could end up mentally unstable. Tim O’Brien and Gregory Van Maanen are
successful in doing this because they have been able to move on with their lives without completely forgetting what they saw during war.

*Dr. Jonathan Shay is a psychiatrist who has devoted his career to caring for veterans who suffer from PTSD—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Dr. Shay spoke at the Memorial Art Gallery on February 8th in conjunction with the exhibition of Gregory Van Maanen’s work.*