

Humanities Core Course, Spring 2016
Instructor: Tamara Beauchamp

Study Questions for Carol Burke's "The Things They Bring to War"

Be as detailed as possible in your answers and make direct references to the text with citations. All study questions for this section are for your own use in understanding the material. They will be useful for exam review, as the instructor pulls heavily from this material in formulating questions and in framing essay prompts.

1. What is a "meat tag" and what is the ostensible justification that soldiers give for getting one? How does Burke instead understand the ritual?
2. How does Burke characterize the mission of "today's wars of counterinsurgency"? How does the mission of that kind of war differ from those we have encountered in the course until now?
3. Why do American commanders find the expression "Isha'Allah" occasionally irritating when issued by Afghan National Army members? Do you think that this anecdote suggests other kinds of cultural divides between the American and Afghan militaries?
4. In her treatment of 'magical' or talismanic objects in this context, Burke suggests that the objects are often drained of their original religious significance and are instead endowed with the powers of an amulet or lucky charm. How does this relate to these objects' status as gifts?
5. Burke argues that much of the power of these amulets is acquired over time. How and why? How do you relate this to the predominant motif of superstition in *Billy Lynn's Long Half Time Walk*?
6. What does Christopher Peterson conclude about the psychological and chemical basis for a sentimental attachment to stuffed animals?
7. How does Burke characterize the subcultural variations between the branches of the US military?
8. An amulet is an object thought to give protection against evil, danger, or disease (*Oxford English Dictionary*). A totem is an object believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance and adopted by it as an emblem (*OED*). What is the difference between these two concepts? Does Burke characterize the Marine scout-sniper's "hog's tooth" as an amulet or a totem? Why?
9. What is the primary form of advantage that Western forces hold in "today's asymmetric wars"? What is an advantage held by 'enemy' forces?
10. How does anthropologist Bronisław Kasper Malinowski differentiate between religion and science?
11. Is there empirical evidence to support the idea that devices and practices believed to lend luck actually improve performance? Describe these studies.

12. What kind of ritual significance do tattoos have for soldiers upon returning from deployment? How does this differ from the significance of pre-deployment tattooing?

13. What kind of contraception is available to military personnel and how is it limited? What kind of justification is given for the absence of condoms in certain contexts, and how does Burke interpret that justification?

14. How do you interpret the final paragraph of Burke's chapter? How would you characterize her rhetoric in that passage? What is the intended effect on the reader?