

“Speaking of Courage” Literary Analysis

Point of View:

Characters: Who are they? What do we learn about them? Why are they necessary to the story?

- Norman
- Sally
- Max
- Norman’s father

“Speaking of Courage” is a frame story, a story within a story.

- What is story #1 about?
- What is story #2 (the story within story #1) about?

Setting. Describe each.

1)

2)

PTSD: Pay attention to the “if’s” “would have’s” and “might have’s”

Symptom 1 = _____

Indications:

Symptom 2 = _____

Indications:

Symptom 3 = _____

Indications:

Title: What does the title mean? How is it ironic?

"Speaking of Courage" Review/Study Questions

1. As the story opens, what is Norman Bowker doing?
2. What happened to Norman's friend Max?
3. What happened to his old girlfriend, Sally Kramer?
4. What day of the year does this story take place?
5. Which one of his medals was Norman Bowker especially proud of?
6. What medal did he almost win?
7. How did the Song Tra Bong change during the rainy season?
8. What was it about the river that especially got to Norman?
9. What did the town not care to know about?
10. What does the word "bivouack" mean?
11. What did the old women of the ville yell to the men when they bivouacked in the field?
12. What did the soldiers realize was the purpose of the field?
13. In the field, what was the difference between courage and cowardice?
14. What happened to the platoon late in the night?
15. Who did Norman hear screaming?
16. What did Norman see in the glare of the red flares?
17. How did Norman try to save Kiowa?
18. What made him fail?
19. What would Norman never be able to do?
20. Where is Norman at the very end of the story, and what is he looking at?

"Speaking of Courage"

- A. What narrative point of view is used in "Speaking of Courage"? What problems does Norman confront when he returns home? What seems to prevent him from dealing with them successfully?
- B. Why is this story called "Speaking of Courage"? Assume the title does NOT hold any irony. In what sense does this story speak of courage?
- C. Like other male characters in this novel, Norman Bowker develops an active fantasy life. Why do these men develop these fantasy roles? What do they get from telling these fantasy stories to themselves? What does this tell you about O'Brien's understanding of the way fiction relates to real life?
- D. Why is Norman unable to relate to anyone at home? More importantly, why doesn't he even try?