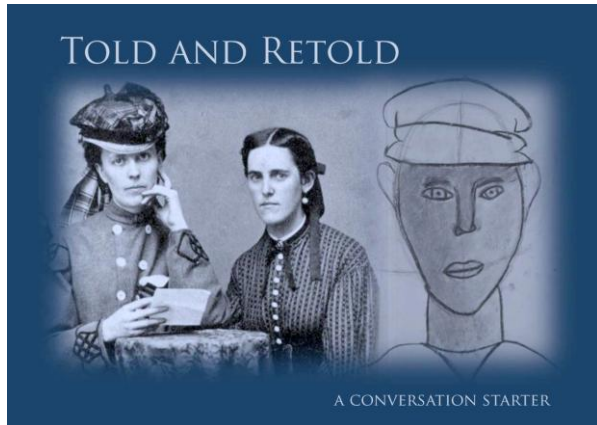


Press Release: "Told and Retold: A Conversation Starter" at the Great Falls Discovery Center



TOLD AND RETOLD: A CONVERSATION STARTER

Student art helps explore war and The BIG READ of "The Things They Carried" at the Great Falls Discovery Center on Fridays and Saturdays during March, with a Community Reception on Saturday, March 5th from 1:00–3:00 pm.

Young readers will help the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (PVMA) explore the themes of this year's BIG READ selection, *The Things They Carried* with approximately 75 portraits created during their Northfield Elementary School art classes and on exhibit at the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls during March. Relating to photographs from PVMA's Memorial Hall Museum and several children's books, the exhibit can be seen on Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm from March 4th through March 26th. Admission is free. The public is invited to a Community Reception on Saturday, March 5th, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm.

Led by Visual Arts Specialist, Althea Dabrowski, the student art serves as a conversation starter, exploring how we talk about war—as adults and as families. Speaking about his novel, *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien says, "In one sense, it's about the Vietnam War, but it's also about storytelling, how stories rule our lives, how they're told and retold as we look for an elusive truth." In collaboration with PVMA's NEA-funded BIG READ, Dabrowski asked her students if they knew of anyone that had ever been in a war. Some classes looked at Civil War-era photographs from Memorial Hall Museum's collection; some brought photographs of soldiers in from home; one girl shared a wedding photograph. Stories emerged. "What's been fascinating is that sometimes the students might not have known who the person in the photograph was. But it became the 'conversation starter.' They know it's *somebody*, they know that somebody in their family went to war," commented Dabrowski.

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Students in three grades were introduced to portraits created by artists as diverse as Modigliani, Picasso, Cezanne, Matisse, Van Gogh, Velasquez, and Rembrandt. They discussed how portrait painters create a *likeness*—whether realistic or abstract—not a photograph. And that even in an abstract work, there are features that make the image recognizable as a person—that the artist might give us clues to who the person was and what he or she was like. The students used an additive process for their portraits, beginning with charcoal, then adding pastels. Each grade also read a picture book focused on a different wartime-era: *Pink and Say* from the Civil War; *My Grandmother's Journey* from WWI and WWII; and *The Lotus Seed* from Vietnam.

The exhibit is one of a number of Big Read events around the valley this winter and spring, and is sponsored by Deerfield's Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's BIG READ of Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and co-sponsored by the Veterans Education Project (www.vetsed.org). "We're so pleased to be able to look at this topic through the eyes of these students and to explore history through literature and art with children *and* adults. The students' work captures the emotion we feel when we talk about war in a unique way," commented PVMA's BIG READ Coordinator, Sheila Damkoehler. In other upcoming events, Dr. Marilyn McArthur will present a program for the Springfield Museums à la Carte series on Thursday, March 10th; and the Hallmark Gallery in Turners Falls will host a compelling exhibit during April and May of David Turner's photographs of local veterans, "I Was There: Stories of War and Homecoming."

The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest. The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association in Deerfield, MA is a vibrant regional historical society supporting Memorial Hall Museum, a research library, Indian House Children's Museum and the Deerfield Teachers' Center. PVMA is also supported in part by a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency, and donations from members and friends. For information about PVMA and other BIG READ events, visit www.deerfield-ma.org or call 413-774-7476 x 10. For information about the Great Falls Discovery Center, visit www.greatfallsma.org or call 413-863-3221.

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