

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“In the Lake of the Woods”

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SAMPLE

AREA 1:

READING & RESPONDING:

IN THE LAKE OF THE WOODS

Chapter 1

GENRE

In the Lake of the Woods is a postmodern novel, characterized by a combination of genres. The text begins as a mystery surrounding the disappearance of Kathy Wade after her husband's landslide electoral loss. The investigation is presented in an illusory way, which is reminiscent of a magician's trick box. *In the Lake of the Woods* is not a traditional mystery story. O'Brien includes numerous investigators and hypotheses. The unnamed narrator takes the role of an investigator who concludes the explanations provided, regarding Kathy and John's disappearance, are possibilities rather than proof.

The events at Thuan Yen during the Vietnam are factual. This element of non-fiction recreates the My Lai massacre and is supported by testimonies at the military hearing, documented in *The Court-Martial of Lt. Calley*. The text raises moral concerns about the atrocities of war. The historical aspects of the novel relate to American politics and culture, thus *In the Lake of the Woods* is also a political text written in the context of an American presidential campaign, which serves to present themes about ambition and power. Another non-fiction element is the inclusion of relevant quotes of professional opinions from psychiatrists, political writers and war historians.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

In the Lake of the Woods is not presented in chronological order. This delineation of the plot leaves the reader to work out the order of events through the flashbacks and flash forwards. The thirty-one chapters of the text describe key events and influences in John Wade's life and provide "evidence" and hypotheses about the disappearance of Kathy. A range of points of view are incorporated and serve to heighten the ambiguity of the investigation.

The novel refers to both facts and causality, thus what really happened is obscured. The non-narrative elements of evidence, which constitutes seven chapters, and hypotheses, which also constitute seven chapters, make up almost half of the novel. These fragments make the story less definite and support the ambiguous ending. However, the repetition of details from different points of view serves to provide greater clarity. The structure of *In the Lake of the Woods* is cyclical, especially regarding the references to the My Lai massacre and the night before the disappearance of Kathy. The juxtaposition of these references to factual, historical quotes is deliberate and intended to strengthen the themes of the novel.