Weekly Pen Pal Journal (40%) – Before the end of the first week of classes, you should register with www.adoptaussoldier.org. [Click on Adopt A US Soldier, follow the instructions on the screen and then “Click Here To Agree To Terms.” When you get to the registration form with fields to fill in place the following in the “comments” field: “I am a student at Chico State University adopting a soldier as part of a course assignment. I can only send letters, not packages.”] After you register, you will be sent an email containing the name and address of a soldier who is currently deployed. You should forward this email to me at lmhouston@csuchico.edu.

You will type a weekly letter to your adopted soldier and you will post it to our online course discussion board. DO NOT SEND YOUR LETTER UNTIL I HAVE APPROVED IT! After I have approved it or made changes, you may either print it out and mail it or hand write a card containing the same text. I know that it costs money to send a letter (as opposed to an email), but it is important that your adopted soldier receives REAL mail. Besides, some of the bases in Iraq and Afghanistan have only one computer to about 600 people, so getting internet access is sometimes difficult. You may never get a response from your adopted soldier but you should keep sending your letters anyway.

Your letters should contain some reflection on what we are reading or discussing in our class, but feel free to include lots of other information. Your adopted soldier may not have had much college, yet, if he or she is twenty-something and will probably not have read the books we are reading. Further guidelines about what to put in your letters are available on adoptaussoldier.com. I can also provide you with further details about what to put in your letters or what NOT to put in your letters. Helpful and supportive topics involve their life and hobbies outside of the military. Good questions might have to do with what they are looking forward to doing when they get back home.

Here is advice from the President of the Chico State Student Veterans Association, Wes Shockley: “Most of them have access to news, so current events seem moot. I think heartfelt letters are good. I got some from elementary classrooms and that was nice, but it would have been pretty interesting to get stuff from college students. Humor is always good, funny, ridiculous stuff. I think thoughtful, insightful questions about how the soldiers experience relates to the ones in the Tim O’Brien books.”

Another friend of mine who is a former Marine (Thanks, Frank!) suggested asking questions about their daily routine, their hobbies, the reasons why they enlisted, and info about where they’re from in the United States. He wrote: “[A]sk questions like ‘What do you plan on doing when you get back?’ You know, give them something to look forward to. Let them know people want to see them when they get back. They need hope in what they might feel is hopeless.”

An optional discussion thread will be provided for you on our course website discussion board to share interesting tidbits about your adopted soldier with the class.