

Part 2: Experiencing the Vietnam War, 1965-1973

Lesson Overview

Students will examine different battles, social movements, government policies, and first-person experiences of the Vietnam War from the beginning of the war in 1965 to 1973 when the last American troops left Vietnam. In groups, students will explore these themes through creative mediums, present research, and hold discussions to analyze the social, political, and military impact of the Vietnam War. Both activities should be prefaced with a review of the provided synopsis or timeline, including the events and questions answered within it.

Wyoming State Social Studies Standards

- SS12.1.1: Analyze unique freedoms, rights, and responsibilities of living in a democratic society and explain their interrelationships.
- SS12.2.2: Analyze human experience and cultural expression (e.g., language literature, arts, traditions, beliefs, spirituality, values, and behavior) and illustrate integrated views of a specific culture.
- SS12.6.1: Analyze, evaluate, and/or synthesize multiple sources of information in diverse formats and media to address a question or solve a problem.

Objectives

- Students will identify events that occurred on the battlefield in Vietnam and the home front in the United States and place them in a broader sociopolitical context.
- Students will analyze first-person accounts of the Vietnam War to determine how the conflict affected different demographics involved.
- Students will collaborate and engage in group discussions to evaluate the impact of the Vietnam War on American foreign and domestic policies and social movements.

Materials

- Synopsis of the war (provided with the lesson plans)
- Recording device (i.e., phone, camera, laptop)
- Laptop/computer for students to individually engage with sources
- Notebooks/paper
- Writing utensils

- Props (optional)

Classroom Activities

News Broadcast

In this activity, students will work in groups to emulate the popular news broadcasts of the 1960s and 1970s to report on events in Vietnam and the United States during the war. The students' news broadcasts will be recorded and presented to the class, with an optional follow-up discussion.

1. Begin this activity with a review of the importance of news media during the Vietnam War. Use this National Archives article written on television during the Vietnam War as a resource before discussing with the students the importance of news media during this time. Alternatively, ask the class to read it individually before beginning the activity: <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2018/01/25/vietnam-the-first-television-war/>
 - a. Next, play this video of a segment of Walter Cronkite's reporting on the war after the Tet Offensive and his subsequent reflection on the segment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYRgSIWBUPA>. Ask the class to reflect on the importance of this news segment, drawing on any prior knowledge they may have of this period and/or the Vietnam War.
2. Divide the students into even groups and ask the groups to sit together before reviewing the instructions of the assignment. Students will be tasked with creating a news segment like Walter Cronkite's to report on topics of their choice that they have researched. Hand out printed copies of these instructions (included on a page at the end of this lesson plan) and review them with the class to answer any questions the students may have.
3. Provide time for students to complete their research and record their news segments. Frequently check in with each group to answer questions, provide guidance, and keep students on track. Toward the end of the research/film time, ask each group to have **one** person share the video with you in a compatible format.
 - a. See "Compilation of Sources" below for additional sources on news media, battles, social movements, and controversies during the Vietnam War provided for your review and to help the students begin their research.
4. Once each group has finished filming, shared their video, and returned to their seats, project each video on a projector or television for the class to watch. Instruct the class to take notes on each video, naming the battles, controversies, and social movements referenced, and writing a brief description or a bulleted list to highlight

key points for each. *If ending with the optional discussion, ask the class to write down any questions, thoughts, or feelings they have while watching the videos.

5. **Optional discussion:** After watching each video, ask the students to gather in a circle. Facilitate a reflective discussion using this prompt: **What thoughts do you have about the controversy and social impact of the Vietnam War? Do you think these responses to the war were justified?** Make note of the battles covered in the videos in your responses.
6. For grading purposes, use the submitted videos to assess the student's individual and group completion of the activity.

First-Person Story Analysis and Discussion

During this lesson, students will individually engage with first-person accounts of the Vietnam War from several different perspectives. After exploring these accounts of the conflict, students will share a summary of their selected accounts and reflect on them in a class discussion about how the war was experienced by multiple demographics.

1. Introduce this activity by explaining the purpose of the assignment: **to explore how the Vietnam War directly affected soldiers and civilians on all sides.** Although the political policies, battles, and controversies often define the Vietnam War in modern history, it must also be evaluated through the lens of those who personally experienced the conflict in varying capacities.
2. Direct students to take out a notebook or paper and a writing utensil to take notes while exploring first-person accounts of the war. Then, instruct the class to work individually to find between 2 and 4 oral or written histories. See "Compilation of Sources: Oral and Written Histories of the Vietnam War" below for resources to give to the class to help their research process.
3. Tell the students to use these questions to guide their note-taking while reading, listening to, or watching accounts:
 - a. What role did this person play in the Vietnam War? Were they a soldier, nurse, civilian, or other? What is the nationality of this person (i.e., American or Vietnamese)?
 - b. What was this person's understanding, interpretation of, or feelings toward the war?
 - c. How did this person experience the war? What effect did it have on them?
 - d. How does engaging with this account change or impact your perception of the Vietnam War?
4. After the students have had sufficient time to review stories and take notes, ask the class to come together in a circle for a class discussion. This discussion will be conducted using the Socratic method, which emphasizes dialogue and critical

thinking. Ask one student to volunteer to begin the discussion with a summary of one of the stories they analyzed, including their reaction to them. Encourage students to respond to one another and make connections between their stories, reactions, thoughts, and perceptions with those of their classmates. Each student must speak at least once in the conversation, either contributing an original thought or responding to and building off someone else's. A student may not speak more than twice *until* every other student has spoken at least once.

- a. Use this link to explore supplemental questions for a Socratic discussion to guide the students' responses and the direction of the conversation:
<https://cetl.uconn.edu/resources/teaching-your-course/leading-effective-discussions/socratic-questions/>
 - b. For grading purposes, keep track of 1) how many times each student responds to the discussion and 2) how engaged and thoughtful responses are (this is subjective and up to interpretation based on your familiarity with your class).
5. If needed for grading, when the discussion is over, ask the students to turn in the notes they took before the end of class.

Compilation of Sources

- News media in the Vietnam War -
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zv7bkqt/revision/5>
- Compilation of articles on the war, including battles, social movements, and controversies - <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war>
- **Controversies Surrounding the Vietnam War**
 - "How the Vietnam War Divided the US" –
<https://www.thecollector.com/vietnam-war-sociocultural-effects/>
 - "Vietnam: A History of America's Controversial War" -
<https://www.historynet.com/the-vietnam-war-a-history-of-americas-controversial-war/>
- **Oral and Written Histories of the Vietnam War**
 - "Eyewitness Accounts from Both Sides of the Vietnam War" -
<https://edgeofhumanity.com/2018/01/11/vietnam-6/>
 - A wide collection of oral histories from interviews on the Vietnam War -
<https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/learn/scholars-researchers/research-divisions/oral-history/collection/vietnam-war/interviews>
 - Library of Congress Veterans History Project -
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/vietnam-war/>

- Explore the different sections of this page to find interviews with American Vietnam War veterans

Planning a Visit to the NMMV

Although the lessons in this series can be implemented in the classroom without time-consuming or difficult preparation, they are also designed to be taught along with a visit to the National Museum of Military Vehicles, specifically the Puller Gallery.

For this lesson (Experiencing the Vietnam War), pay special attention to these displays and/or highlight the significance of these concepts in the museum. All suggestions are made in a chronological sequence and as they appear in the museum's exhibit.

1. The second display in the Vietnam War exhibit, "Women in Service," highlights the significant role of women during the Vietnam War. The film in this section is a powerful example of this, as is the display case titled "Medical Care on the Vietnam Battlefield".
2. Several important concepts are presented in the "Hardened Convoy." At the beginning of this display, read the wall panel "The Draft" and the excerpt titled "Specialist Paul Hubbard" on the backside of the "Hardened Convoy" introduction panel.
3. The "Jungle Warfare" panels and displays present a variety of information about soldiers' experiences, the challenges they faced, and the conditions of fighting in Vietnam. Read through the display cases titled "Tribal Allies," "The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese," and "Prisoners of War."
 - a. Use this information to encourage students to think about the war from the perspectives of different people who experienced it. Ask students to keep in mind the first-person story analysis and discussion activity here.
 - b. Read the "Surprising Encounters" panel and walk through the interactive jungle exhibit and ask students to make note of what they observe here and what thoughts they have about the Vietnam War.
4. In the "Fire Support" exhibit, ask students to read the reader rails titled "Living on the Hill," adjacent to the "Artillery Fire Direction Center" panel, and the "Poncho Hooch" and "Living Quarters" panels at the end of the exhibit.
 - a. These descriptions and accounts illustrate the daily experiences of soldiers in Vietnam during the war.
5. The video played "Living Room War" display, through the exit of the "Fire Support," provides a great model for the students' news broadcasts. Watch this brief video all the way through to observe how events of the Vietnam War were reported on to the American public during the war.

6. After walking through “The Tet Offensive” display and into the next room (with the M50 Ontos tank destroyer on display), read the large wall panels that highlight controversies of the Vietnam War. The panels are titled “There Ain’t No Daylight in Vietnam,” “Hell No We Won’t Go,” “The Johnson Administration,” “Peace with Honor,” and “Agent Orange in Vietnam.”
 - a. These panels will help students explore different topics to include in their news broadcasts.
7. At the end of the “Brown Water Navy” exhibit, encourage students to play and listen to the first-person recorded stories on the “Veteran’s Voices” panels. These stories could be used in their first-person story analyses and/or to further familiarize the students with unique perspectives and experiences of the war.
8. In the last section of the gallery, which displays statistics relevant to the end of the Vietnam War, read the “Coming Home” and “Individual Replacement System” panels on the wall to explore more controversies and experiences of the war.

News Broadcast Assignment Directions:

1. With your group, select one battle of the Vietnam War, one social movement that occurred in the United States during this period, and one controversy of the war to report on.
2. While you research these events, take notes on each and answer these questions, which must be included in the news segment:
 - a. What is the name of the event? Where did it take place and when?
 - b. Who did this battle, controversy, or movement involve? What was its goal or mission?
 - c. What was the historical significance of this event? Can any connections be made to foreign relations, policies, or social movements today?
 - d. What was the result of this event? How did it end and who did it affect?
3. Assign roles to each member of the group. Roles could include reporters, witnesses, interviewees, cameramen, etc. Each student must appear in the video at least once, so if one person is recording the roles must be rotated. The format of the news broadcast may be set up however each group desires, but there must be at least one reporter at all times, and discussion in the segment needs to include the answers to the research questions.

4. After each person in the group has been assigned their role(s), write a script for the news broadcast to read from while filming.
5. When ready, film the segment. **Each broadcast should be 8 to 10 minutes in length.** Rewatch the completed video before submitting it to your teacher to ensure that it does not include extensive errors or that any portion needs to be refilmed. Graphics and editing are not necessary, but if you wish to include them you may use any extra time **after** completing filming to make these changes.
6. Your group to submit the video to your teacher as instructed.