

## AERO Social Studies Unit

**Name of unit:** Lessons Learned from Vietnam: A High School American History Unit  
Analyzing Political, Military, and Social Impact

Grade level: high school

**Length of unit:** 4 weeks

**Developer and contact information:** Greg Goddard, St. Louis Park High School, St. Louis Park, MN (goddardgang@yahoo.com)

**Unit synopsis:**

This unit is designed to provide high school students a structure for investigating one of the most studied and controversial periods in American history. Through the use of primary and secondary source material, students will investigate the assumptions, expectations, goals, and consequences for many of the important decisions made throughout the Vietnam War.

Students will come to understand the geo-political significance of Vietnam as a continuation of the Cold War strategic positioning in the region. The culminating activity for the unit will be a mock-debate between North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh and United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. This activity will require students to research an assigned position or role and voice their perspective during the proceedings. The debate will illustrate the various political, economic, religious, and social issues involved in the protracted war.

Finally, students will be asked to evaluate the costs and benefits of a war that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform, subjected a civilian population to an equal toll causing millions of refugees, and left two countries economically and socially devastated. Historians continue to debate how the strongest military power in the world failed to prevail over a small, barely industrialized nation. This unit will provide students the opportunity to investigate some of the answers to these questions.

**Core standard and benchmarks:**

Standard 2 – Connections and Conflict  
Benchmarks 2.12c, f, h; 4.12a; 6.12d

**Core topics and/or themes:**

Themes: Ideas and Beliefs, Cultures

**Supporting benchmarks and content topics (regional and/or time connections):**

1.12a, b, e, f  
2.12a, b, d, e, g, i  
3.12e  
4.12f, g  
5.12a  
6.12a, c, e, f, h, l, m

*Regional Connections:*

This unit incorporates various national and regional perspectives on the conflict. A profound study of the Vietnam War must include some of these global views: Vietnam, France, Great Britain, China, Japan, Soviet Union, Cambodia, and Laos.

*Time and Continuity Connections:*

The unit includes a lecture on the evolution of foreign occupation in Vietnam. Some of the primary and secondary source material assigned to students will make connections to previous and subsequent military engagements such as the centuries-long conflicts between the Vietnamese and Chinese, French occupation and rule, the American Civil War, World War II, the Korean War, and the Soviet Union – Afghanistan War of 1979.

*Contemporary Connections:*

A primary goal of the unit is to have students come to understand the long-term effects of the war including the legacy that remains in Vietnam and the mutually agreed on desire by most Americans never to experience “Another Vietnam”. Some of the connections made to modern times include:

Vietnamese Refugees  
Integration of North and South Vietnam  
End of the Cold War  
1991 Persian Gulf War  
2003 War with Iraq  
Modern American Hegemony

*Values Connections:*

The Vietnam War lends itself to an analysis of cultural, political, and economic values. Students will be asked to evaluate how differing values played a role in some of the assumptions and decisions that were made on both sides of the conflict.

Personal freedom v. collective good  
Capitalism v. communism  
Cultural identity and autonomy  
Self determination  
Domino Theory

**Driving questions:**

- a. How and why did the United States become involved in Vietnam? What national security or geo-political interest was there in this Southeast Asian country?
- b. What assumptions were made by the United States when forming its foreign policy toward Vietnam throughout the 1960s and early 1970s?
- c. What factors made this war different from previous conflicts the United States had been involved in?
- d. In what ways and for what reasons did the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union influence decisions made by U.S. leaders regarding Vietnam?
- e. How did the American media play a role in raising doubts about the nation’s moral stance in the war?
- f. To what degree were military or political decisions influenced by public discontent for the war?
- g. How has the Vietnam War affected political and military decision-making in the United States since the war?

**Culminating assessment (attach scoring rubric):**

Each student will be assigned a specific role to play during a mock debate between Ho Chi Minh and Robert McNamara. The debate will attempt to re-enact the primary arguments for and against a prolonged and increased U.S. military presence in the region. Students will be given three days to research the primary arguments and perspectives for their assigned role. The mock debate will be limited to 100 minutes and will allow each individual or group of individuals to voice their arguments in an attempt to persuade the leaders of the two sides to follow a particular

course of action. Students will be evaluated on the accuracy of their research and the effectiveness of their oral arguments.

Possible roles include:

Ho Chi Minh	Robert F. Kennedy
Robert McNamara	Henry Kissinger
Duong Van Minh	Henry Cabot Lodge
Le Duc Tho	Walt W. Rostow
Wayne Morse	Dean Rusk
Ngo Dinh Diem	William Westmoreland
Madam Ngo Dinh Nhu	Earle Wheeler
Vo Nguyen Giap	Maxwell Taylor
Pierre Mendés-France	Zhou Enlai
George Ball	Buddhist Monk
Chester Bowles	Martin Luther King, Jr
McGeorge Bundy	Jerry Rubin
J. William Fulbright	Daniel Ellsberg
George Kenan	Eugene McCarthy
African-American Soldier	
Member - Students for a Democratic Society	
College Student(s) at Kent State University	

**Instructional activities (include time needed, resources, and interim assessments):**

The Lessons Learned from the War in Vietnam unit is designed to last four weeks, but teachers are advised to add or subtract from this unit to fit their schedule and students' learning style. This unit requires that students do a significant amount of homework and out of class research in preparation for classroom discussions and activities.

Day 1 - Lecture: Background to the Vietnam War

French Imperialism in Indochina

The Rise of Vietnam Nationalism

Dienbienphu

Geneva Peace Accords

Students are assigned selected readings from various secondary sources: Cable, Gaddis, Hess, Karnow, and Schulzinger.

Day 2- Lecture: The Origins of U. S. Involvement

Truman Doctrine

The United States and Containment

The Korean War

Marshall Plan

Domino Theory

Students are assigned selected readings from secondary sources: (refer to Day 1 assignment above).

Day 3- Jigsaw Assignment & Group Research

Each student will be assigned to a group (A, B, C, D, or E) that will be responsible for researching and presenting (15 minutes) on one historical question related to the War. Group members will work together to research and prepare their presentations. This will assure uniform quality presentations. On Days 6 & 7 each member will Jigsaw with one member from

each of the other groups and share information with one another. Five groups of 5 to 6 members are ideal.

*Historical Questions to Consider:*

- How did American involvement in Vietnam escalate?
- Which United States Presidents were involved in the Vietnam War and what did they do to increase or decrease American involvement?
- Who were the key military and political leaders for the North Vietnamese? South Vietnamese? What did they do that affected the events of the War?
- Who were the key American military leaders and diplomats and what did they do that affected the events of the war?
- What analogies or paradigms were used by American leaders in making decisions about United States involvement in the region?

Day 4- Group Research

Day 5- Group Research

Day 6- Jigsaw Activity

One group member from each group comes together to share their individual information on the question they were to consider. Dialogue, questions, and note taking are encouraged. Each presenter is limited to 15 minutes.

Day 7- Jigsaw Activity Concluded

Day 8- Evaluation of Days 1 – 7: In-class Essay Assignment (or take- home essay assignment)

*Possible Questions:*

- Evaluate the role of ideological differences between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese during their Civil War.
- To what extent did fear contribute to the origin and development of the War in Vietnam?
- Assess the role of “spheres of influence” in contributing to the origin and development of the War in Vietnam.

Day 9- Lecture: Who Fought the War?

Americans

Army of the Republic of Vietnam

Vietcong

North Vietnamese Army

Students are assigned selected readings from various collections of primary source material, including: Terry, Edelman, Monk, and Charnoff Students are to read the material and prepare for a seminar discussion.

Day 10- Seminar Discussion on Assigned Readings:

The Experiences of Those Who Served: A View From Both Sides of the Conflict.

Students are to prepare for an in-depth analysis of the assigned readings.

Day 11-Panel Discussion: Personal Stories From The Era.

Possible panel guests could include:

- Enlisted Vietnam Veterans
- Drafted Vietnam Veterans
- Multiple tour Vets

- Women who served
- Ethnic minorities who served
- Peace activists or anti-war protesters
- Conscientious objectors
- Vietnamese Veterans
- Vietnamese Refugees
- Deferment candidates

Day 12 - Introduction of Mock Debate Assignment (see culminating assessment, above)

Day 13 - Research on Assigned Personality

Day 14 - Research on Assigned Personality

Day 15 - Mock Debate

Day 16 - Mock Debate – Conclusion

Day 17 -The War Debate in America

People throughout the conflict voiced both pro- and anti-war arguments. Students will be exposed to various images, songs, and slogans that influenced public opinion during the Vietnam War era:

- Bumper Stickers (both pro- and anti-war)
- Pictures from Life magazine
- Kent State photographs
- Photograph of a South Vietnamese officer executing a prisoner
- “Girl Burned by Napalm” photograph
- Songs from the era
  - Blowin’ in the Wind – Bob Dylan
  - Ohio – Neil Young
  - Fixin’ to Die Young – Country Joe McDonald
  - What’s Goin’ On? – Marvin Gaye

*Take-home Essay Assignment:* Students are to write an essay explaining how and why these images, songs, and slogans influenced public opinion over the course of the war.

Day 18 - Lecture: The Final Years of United States Involvement in Vietnam

Nixon and Kissinger

Laos

Cambodia

Paris Agreement

Day 19 - Final Unit Exam

**Resources: Books, Articles, Memoirs:**

Buzzanco, Robert, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*, (1996).

Cable, Larry, *Unholy Grail: The US and the War in Vietnam, 1965-1968*, (1991).

Charnoff, David, and Van Toai, Doan, *Portrait of the Enemy*, (1986).

Denenberg, Barry, *Voices from Vietnam*, (1997).

Edelman, Bernard, ed., *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, (1994).

Gaddis, John Lewis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, (1972).

Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American*, (1955).

Hammond, William M., *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War*, (1995).  
Henretta, James; David Broody; and Lynn Dumenil, *America: A Concise History*, (1998).  
Herring, George C., *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (1996).  
Hess, Gary R., *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War*, (1990).  
Karnow, Stanley, *Vietnam: A History*, (1997).  
McNamara, Robert, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, (1995).  
Monk, Linda, ed., *Ordinary Americans: US History Through the Eyes of Everyday People*, (1994).  
Murrin, John M. et al., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People, 3rd ed.*, (2002).  
Neu, Charles E., ed., *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*, (2000).  
Sheehan, Neil, *After the War Was Over: Hanoi and Saigon*, (1993).  
Schulzinger, Robert D., *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*, (1997).  
Terry, Wallace, *Bloods: An Oral History of Vietnam*, (1984).

### **Online Resources:**

\_ HYPERLINK "<http://www.school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/vietnam/>"  
\_\_<http://www.school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/vietnam/>  
\_ HYPERLINK "<http://www.teachvietnam.org>" \_\_<http://www.teachvietnam.org>  
PBS Vietnam Online Reflections  
The Vietnam War Internet Project

### **Summary of Assessment Activities and Instruments:**

- Days 6 & 7- Jigsaw Activity – Benchmarks Assessed: 1.12f, 2.12a, 2.12d, 2.12e, 2.12f, 2.12h, 2.12i, 3.12e, 4.12g, 5.12a, 6.12c, 6.12m
- Day 8- In-class Essay Assignment – Benchmarks Assessed: 1.12e, 1.12f, 2.12e, 2.12h, 2.12i, 2.12g, 5.12a, 6.12c, 6.12d
- Day 10- Seminar Discussion – Benchmarks Assessed: 2.12f, 4.12f, and 5.12a
- Days 15& 16- Mock Debate – Benchmarks Assessed: 1.12a, 1.12b, 1.12f, 2.12b, 2.12e, 2.12f, 2.12g, 3.12e, 4.12a, 4.12f, 4.12g, 5.12a, 6.12a, 6.12c, 6.12d, 6.12f, 6.12h, 6.12m
- Day 17- Take Home Essay Assignment – Benchmarks Assessed: 2.12f, 4.12a, 4.12g, 5.12a, 6.12f, 6.12h, 6.12l, 6.12m
- Day 19- Final Unit Exam – Benchmarks Assessed: 1.12a, 1.12b, 1.12f, 2.12b, 2.12e, 2.12f, 2.12g, 3.12e, 4.12a, 4.12f, 4.12g, 5.12a, 6.12a, 6.12c, 6.12d, 6.12f, 6.12h, 6.12m

### **Post Unit Reflections:**

After completing the Lessons Learned from the War in Vietnam unit, teachers are encouraged to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the unit and state how it could be revised to improve student learning and comprehension.