



VIETNAM WAR: AMERICAN/SAIGON (SOUTH VIETNAM) PERSPECTIVE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION POINTS

TEACHERS: Have students answer the questions below based upon their viewing of the film clips. They should draw evidence from the videos to support their responses.

I. ROLE OF US ADVISORS IN EARLY STAGES OF VIETNAM WAR

GOAL: The following questions focus on the early stages of US involvement in Vietnam. The goal is to gauge student understanding of the initial advisory role.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: The Vietnam War began as a civil conflict pitting North Vietnam and Communists in the South (Viet Cong) against the Saigon government. By the early 1960's, the clash had escalated as Hanoi plotted to unify the entire country under Communist rule. Starting in the late 1950's, American military advisors were sent to support the South Vietnamese resistance to aggression from North Communist-led insurgents (Viet Cong). Escalating violence led to the commitment of American ground forces there by 1965.

FILM CLIPS: Have students watch the following video clips:

- Why the US Got Involved - (:38)
- US Advisors in Vietnam (1950's – 70's) - (:29)

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why did President John F. Kennedy send troops to support the South Vietnamese?
- In what ways did American advisors initially assist the South Vietnamese? During what timeframe were advisors first present in Vietnam?
- Do you think it is important for the United States to assist countries seeking freedom from aggression? Put yourself in President Kennedy's place and try to imagine sending US troops overseas. What types of questions might he have asked himself? What toll do you think the decision may have had on him?

II. THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT

GOAL: This section focuses on the incident that escalated US military involvement in Vietnam and the steps that took place to engage US military action.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: The Gulf of Tonkin is off the coast of North Vietnam. In 1964, several U.S. Naval destroyers were stationed at the Gulf, providing support for the South Vietnamese patrol boats. Between August 2 and August 4, 1964, two destroyers were attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats. On August 7, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson introduced The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The resolution passed unanimously in the U.S. House and by all but two votes in the Senate. The attack at the Gulf of Tonkin and the Resolution are significant because it marks the flow of U.S. forces into Vietnam, with the first landing of marines in 1965. The resolution gave the president the wherewithal to make that happen.

FILM CLIPS: Have students watch the following video clip:

- Gulf of Tonkin Incident (August 1964) - (1:07)



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GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Consider the role of a president or a military official, and the ability to send troops into war.
- Do you think that today's Congress would approve the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? Why/why not?
- If you were a Senator or a Representative, what types of questions do you think you might ask before signing a resolution such as this?

III. OPERATION STARLITE AND INCREASED U.S. INVOLVEMENT

GOAL: The following section provides insights into the on-the-ground fighting in Vietnam.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: In August 1965, Brigadier General Thomas Draude and his batalian fought to protect the Chu Lai air base in South Vietnam. This activity, Operation Starlight, was the first major battle in Vietnam for US ground forces. From that point forward, the presence of US forces increased, and by 1966, troops were located throughout the core areas of Vietnam. Draude stayed in Vietnam through 1966.

FILM CLIPS: Have students watch the following video clips:

- Operation Starlight (1965) - (:32)
- Increased US Troop Deployment (1966) - (:30)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why was it important for the US to protect the Chuli Air Base? What may have happened if it had fallen?
- Discuss the geography of Vietnam – what challenges may the troops have faced in order to be located throughout the region? Topography? Weather and climate? Military threats?

IV. ANTI-WAR SENTIMENT ESCALATES AND THE LONG PROCESS OF LEAVING VIETNAM

GOAL: This section provides students with a better understanding of the challenges to leaving Vietnam.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: As the US was pulled deeper and deeper into the conflict, anti-war sentiment grew. In the 1960's, young Americans took to the streets and on college campuses to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam. South Vietnam witnessed anti-war dissent as well. The Easter Offensive is a little known battle that occurred over the Easter weekend of 1972. During the battle, over 200,000 North Vietnamese troops and 200 tanks crossed into South Vietnam and overran the South Vietnam forces. It was the last attack by the North. Just one year later, in 1973, a negotiated settlement led to the withdrawal of American troops. In 1975, South Vietnam (Saigon) fell and more than 1.65 million Vietnamese were relocated to the United States.

FILM CLIPS: Have students watch the following video clips:

- Vietnamization (1969) - (:45)
- Cambodian Invasion (1970) - (1:12)
- The Easter Offensive (1972) - (:49)
- The Fall of Saigon (1975) - (:59)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What types of stressors may have led to the US withdrawal?
- How did the Cambodian Invasion impact what was happening in Vietnam? How was it perceived in the US?
- What might the outcomes have been during the Easter Offensive if US advisors had played a role in planning and implementation?
- Imagine that you are a refugee, forced to flee to another country. What are some of questions you might ask? What types of fears might you have to face? What might it be like to be resettled into another country?



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V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US AND VIETNAM TODAY

GOAL: This series of questions is designed to encourage students to explore the relationship between the US and Vietnam, as it exists today.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: The Vietnam War lasted more than 19 years before Hanoi ultimately toppled the Saigon government in 1975, several years after the U.S. withdrawal. Many lives on both sides were lost, including over 58,000 Americans. Despite the losses, the US and Vietnam have made great strides in diplomacy.

FILM CLIPS: Have students watch the following video clips:

- US Military Relationship (present day) - (1:51)
- Reaction to Americans (present day) - (:25)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Can you think of other examples where countries have worked to develop a positive relationship after a war or conflict? Do you think this relationship is unique?
- If you have a family member who fought in Vietnam, have they talked with you about their experiences? What types of challenges do you think Vietnam veterans may still face today? In what ways do you think you might be able to help a veteran (family or not)?