

# Table of Contents

*Teacher Introduction* .....v

*Overview: The Vietnam War* .....vii

**LESSONS**

**1. French Colonialism**

*Teacher Page* .....1

*Student Worksheet* .....3

**2. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**

*Teacher Page* .....5

*Student Worksheet* .....7

**3. The My Lai Massacre**

*Teacher Page* .....9

*Student Worksheet* .....11

**4. Antiwar Protests**

*Teacher Page* .....13

*Student Worksheet* .....15

**5. Vietnamization, the Paris Accords, and the End of the War**

*Teacher Page* .....17

*Student Worksheet* .....19

**Culminating Activity** .....21

*Teacher Page* .....21

*Student Worksheet* .....22

**Appendix** .....23

*Answer Key* .....25

*Rubrics* .....27

*Related Web Sites* .....34

# DOCUMENT-BASED ACTIVITIES ON THE VIETNAM WAR TEACHER INTRODUCTION

## Description:

Students will learn about the Vietnam War, and how the United States became involved in the conflict between the years of 1960 and 1975. The unit begins with an exploration of French colonialism in Vietnam and ends with the Paris Accords. Students discuss both the national and international implications of the Vietnam War, analyze U.S. policy decisions and debate student protest movements. Students are exposed to speeches, written documents, political cartoons, music, and photographs. The unit as a whole centers around the following question: Should the United States have gotten involved in Vietnam?

## Unit objectives:

Knowledge: students will

- understand the nature of French colonialism in Vietnam
- evaluate U.S. war policies and resolutions
- debate and discuss the antiwar protest movement

Skills:

- analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary source documents
- discuss and debate issues use evidence to draw conclusions

## Prior Knowledge Required:

Students will need to have a thorough understanding of the Cold War. Students will need to be familiar with French Colonialism in Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration's policies, 1960s counterculture, the civil rights movement and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society.

Teachers should use these lessons to teach the Vietnam War in conjunction with other activities, lessons and lectures. Although these lessons discuss French Colonialism, Lyndon B. Johnson, the My Lai Massacre, antiwar protests, and the Paris Accords, students will also need to be introduced and exposed to the Tet Offensive, controversies over prisoners of war, the structure of the South Vietnamese army and government, and more.

## Lesson Format:

Each lesson consists of two parts: a teacher page and a student handout or worksheet. The teacher page contains an overview, objectives, materials (including Web addresses), directions, discussion questions, and an extension activity. Each student handout contains an introduction, directions, Web addresses, and questions to be answered about the source.

Assessment:

Most questions on the student handouts are short-answer questions and evaluation should be done based on the precision and accuracy of answers. Suggested answer keys can be found in the Appendix. Point values are not assigned to questions on the worksheets in order to allow teachers to evaluate students according to standards that have been previously developed and maintained in the classroom. It is recommended, however, that teachers evaluate student worksheets in conjunction with their involvement in class discussions. Suggested rubrics can found in the Appendix.

Additional Sources:

The Appendix contains answer keys, an annotated list of Web sites on the Vietnam War, rubrics, and supplementary materials available from [www.socialstudies.com](http://www.socialstudies.com).

## OVERVIEW: THE VIETNAM WAR

*“I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home... But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.”<sup>1</sup>*

—President Lyndon B. Johnson

The roots of the conflict between the United States and the North Vietnamese went all the way back to when French authorities and military personnel arrived on Vietnamese soil during the second half of the nineteenth century. The French conquest of Indochina was part of a larger pattern of European imperialism, as the French took advantage of the Vietnamese land and people to export rice, rubber, and coal. During the early 20th century, however, resentment of French rule helped spur the rise of Vietnamese nationalism. It was during this time that Ho Chi Minh, who would later lead the North Vietnamese in the war against the United States, became a committed Communist revolutionary.<sup>2</sup>

In 1945, at the end of World War II and Japanese/French occupation, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam to be an independent country, free of imperial rule. Years of fighting between the French and Vietnamese followed. The U.S. sent aid, committing money and resources to support the French in the hopes of preventing the spread of communism. Ultimately, however, the French were dealt a devastating defeat at Dien Bien Phu; shortly afterward at the Geneva Conference, they formally withdrew from Vietnam, and a treaty divided the country at the 17th parallel. The northern half of Vietnam, ruled by Ho Chi Minh, was committed to communism and the southern half of Vietnam was committed to democracy. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations, in the wake of the Cold War, felt it necessary to prevent the spread of communism into South Vietnam at all costs. The “Domino theory,” subscribed to by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and other Johnson advisers, maintained that if one country became communist, neighboring countries would themselves become communist, falling like dominoes.

In 1964, after a skirmish between North Vietnamese ships and U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf just off Vietnam, Johnson presented Congress with what came to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. The resolution essentially gave Johnson the power to increase the American military presence in Southeast Asia, and marked the beginning of full-scale U.S. involvement in the conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. It would take roughly fifteen years for the United States to find peace both at home and abroad. The fighting in Vietnam was characterized by “search and destroy” missions, often leading frustrated U.S. soldiers into poor and/or unoccupied villages. Troops neither spoke the language, nor could they easily identify the enemy. The Vietcong—familiar with the climate, terrain, and seasons—engaged the United States in guerilla warfare on their own territory. The U.S. engaged in massive bombing campaigns that often spilled

1. “Vietnam, An American Ordeal” by George Donelson Moss pg. 157.

2. Please note that it is difficult to summarize the entirety of the Vietnam War in two pages or less. I recommend, “Vietnam, An American Ordeal” by George Donelson Moss as an excellent resource on the U.S./Vietnam Conflict.

over into neighboring Laos or Cambodia. Atrocities occurred on both sides; the most famous case involved American soldiers occurred in 1968 and came to be known as the My Lai Massacre. In the Quang Ngai Province U.S. troops killed roughly 300 to 400 innocent civilians while searching for Vietcong guerrillas. The incident received widespread media attention, and provoked both shock and outrage back home. Lt. William Calley became the public face of the massacre, and was the first American to be court-martialed for committing atrocities during war.

Antiwar protests became more and more prevalent as the U.S. commitment in Vietnam escalated. They were fueled by and joined with many of the social movements going on at the same time such as the civil rights movement, the Women's Liberation movement, and 1960s counterculture, and "flower power." Protesters engaged in acts of civil disobedience, and although most rallies were peaceful, some turned violent, leading to beatings, arrests, and even the deaths of some antiwar advocates. Students rioted on university campuses, conscientious objectors rose in numbers, and draft dodgers fled to Canada or Mexico.

The war finally came to an end for the U.S. in 1973, when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Nixon agreed to sign the Paris Accords, ending U.S. involvement and bringing soldiers (and prisoners of war) home. Two years later, North Vietnamese troops captured Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital, bringing the war to an end and unifying the country under communist rule. Although the American War in Vietnam ended in 1973, the United States did not normalize its relations with the Vietnamese government until the 1990s.

## French Colonialism Teacher Page

### Overview:

The goal of this activity is to give students an understanding of French colonialism in Vietnam. Students read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, a speech delivered by Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi on September 2nd, 1945.

### Objectives:

Students will:

- understand and interpret the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence
- draw conclusions on Vietnamese society under French colonial rule

### Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

All Web links for this lesson can be found at: <http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>

The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence

In addition, a list of Web pages from the Library of Congress that provide students with background information on French colonial rule in Vietnam can be found at <http://socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>.

### Strategies:

Discuss French colonialism in Vietnam and the transition of power from the French to the Japanese. Have students complete the worksheet, then discuss the document's historical significance with the whole class. Following this lesson, the class should discuss the Geneva Accords and developments in Vietnam prior to 1960 in order to learn how the U.S. became involved in defending democracy in South Vietnam.

### Wrap-Up:

After students complete the worksheet, review answers as a class and use the following questions to lead a discussion.

1. Why was Vietnam a politically unstable country following World War II?
2. Was Ho Chi Minh an effective leader? What do we learn from his speech that leads us to believe he would become an effective leader?
3. How might the spirit of Ho Chi Minh's declaration have functioned later in the war against the United States?

Extension Activity:

Have students read the Geneva Accords and debate the conclusions drawn in the Geneva Accords. Pose the following question: “In their involvement in Vietnam, did the U.S. repeat mistakes made earlier by the French?”

Name:  
Period:

## **French Colonialism Student Worksheet**

### Introduction:

France established a stronghold in the southern region of Vietnam during the later half of the nineteenth century. By 1883, French authority extended over the entire country. The French conquest of Indochina was part of a larger pattern of European imperialism, as the French took advantage of both the Vietnamese land and people to export rice, rubber, and coal. During the early 20th century, however, resentment of French rule helped spur the rise of Vietnamese nationalism. It was during this rise of nationalism that Ho Chi Minh stepped onto the scene and became a committed communist revolutionary. He would later lead the North Vietnamese in the war against the United States.

All web links for this lesson can be found at: <http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>

### Directions:

#### **The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence**

President Ho Chi Minh delivered this address in Hanoi on September 2nd, 1945. Answer the following questions regarding this document:

1. Why might Ho Chi Minh have borrowed phrases from the United States Declaration of Independence and the French Rights of Man and the Citizen?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. According to the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, how were the Vietnamese treated under French Imperial rule?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are some of the Vietnamese grievances against the French? Provide two or three specific examples.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Who ruled Vietnam after 1940? Why?

