

Teacher Introduction

These Common Core History Assessments are designed to help your students develop key literacy and history thinking skills as they learn about the Vietnam War. The assessments are intended to be *formative* more than *summative*. That is, they are meant to be part of the instructional process itself, providing you and your students with information at a point when timely adjustments in teaching and learning can be made.

Similar sets of assessments are available (or planned) for each unit in a typical American History class.

★ *Historical Thinking and the Challenge of the Common Core*

This set includes nine assessments aligned with the first nine Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards. We have left out the tenth Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard, which does not lend itself to assessments of the sort provided here. The set also includes two writing tasks aligned with two key Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards.

These Common Core standards challenge history teachers to develop in students the complex literacy skills they need in today's world and the ability to master the unique demands of working with historical primary and secondary source texts. The Common Core standards are supportive of the best practices in teaching historical thinking. Such practices include close reading, attending to a source's point of view and purpose, corroborating sources, and placing sources in their historical context. These are the skills needed to make history less about rote learning and more about an active effort to investigate and interpret the past.

These assessments are also useful in many ways for ELA teachers. They assess many of the skills specified in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, which put a good deal of emphasis on the reading of informational texts. The Anchor Standards form the basis for all of the various Common Core standards for English Language Arts.

★ *What Are These Assessments Like?*

- *A group of nine reading skills assessments and two writing tasks for each major era of American History*

Each reading skills assessment is based on one of the key Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards. Two writing tasks are based on the first two College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing, which are the basis for the Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards. The two writing standards focus on writing arguments to support claims and writing informative/explanatory texts.

- *Based on primary or secondary sources*

In most cases, one primary source is used. In some cases, an assessment is based on more than one primary source or on a primary and a secondary source. The sources are brief. In most cases, texts have been slightly altered to improve readability but without changing meaning or tone.

- *Brief tasks promoting historical literacy*

For each assessment, students write brief answers to one or two questions. The questions are not tests of simple factual recall. They assess the students' mastery of the skills addressed by that assessment's Common Core History/Social Studies Standard.

- *Two versions of each of the nine reading standards assessments*

A BASIC and an ADVANCED version of each assessment are provided. The BASIC Assessment addresses the Common Core Standard for grades 6–8. The ADVANCED Assessment is based on the Common Core Standard for grades 9–10 and grades 11–12 combined. Each version uses the same source or sources. In some cases, sources have been somewhat shortened for the BASIC version.

- *Easy to use both as learning and assessment tools*

These assessments do not take valuable time away from instruction. The primary sources and background information on each source make them useful mini-lessons as well as tools to assess student historical thinking skills. The sources all deal with themes and trends normally covered when teaching the relevant historical era.

- *Evaluating student responses*

Brief but specific suggestions are provided defining acceptable and best responses to each question asked in the assessment. The suggestions are meant to aid in evaluating students, but even more importantly they are a way for teachers to help students better understand and master the skills on which the assessment is focused.

The Vietnam War Assessment 1

Basic Level

Teacher Instructions

Based on Common Core Reading Standard 1 for grades 6–8

★ Key Ideas and Details

1. **(6–8)** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

★ Using this Assessment

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The Vietnam War: Assessment 1 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 1 for grades 6–8. It asks students to cite specific textual evidence from two documents. It also challenges students to adapt that reading skill to the unique demands of thinking historically as they carefully interpret textual evidence in a primary source from a time in the past and a secondary source account of that same time in the past.

★ Evaluating Student Responses to this Assessment

[This section is not available for review on sample pages]

The Vietnam War: Assessment 1

Directions: This exercise asks you to read a secondary source document and a primary source document carefully and answer questions about specific details in the documents. In order to better understand the documents, read and make use of the source information located just below each document. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the two assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Document 1: A Secondary Source

In 1961, North Vietnam was stepping up its aid to rebels seeking to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. President Kennedy was not sure how best to aid South Vietnam in the face of a worsening situation there. He sent General Maxwell Taylor and presidential aide Walt Rostow to investigate. The Taylor-Rostow Report recommended improved U.S. training of South Vietnam's forces, helicopters and other equipment to help South Vietnam fight the rebels, U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, and increased use of U.S. troops. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy basically backed the report. Other officials, including Under Secretary of State George Ball, warned against aiding what they saw as an unpopular and repressive South Vietnamese government. Kennedy was not entirely happy with the report, but he did agree on greater U.S. military aid to South Vietnam and the introduction of more U.S. soldiers.

Ball had earlier studied the effects of American bombing against Germany during World War II. He concluded it was not that effective. As a lawyer working in Paris after the war, he also paid close attention to France's disastrous defeat in the 1950s when it tried to re-conquer Vietnam as a French colony. He believed the most important U.S. interests were in Europe and its future, not Asia or other parts of the world. All of these factors help explain why he took the stand he did regarding the Taylor-Rostow report on Vietnam.

Source Information: This is a secondary source document. It deals with a debate about Vietnam within the Kennedy administration in 1961. A secondary source is an account of past events written later by someone who did not experience or take part in those events. As a secondary source, this document is not evidence from this early phase of the Vietnam War itself. It is a later account by someone writing about that time. This particular historical account was written in 2013 specifically for use as part of this activity.

Document 2: A Primary Source

When General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow returned from a mission to Vietnam, they brought with them a report advocating that America introduce some military forces into South Vietnam to raise national morale, perform logistical tasks, and conduct combat operations in support of the [South Vietnamese] military. It concluded that “the risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of South Vietnam are present but not impressive,” since among other things, North Vietnam was “extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing.” That was Maxwell Taylor’s view which, on the basis of my own experience in Europe, I always thought was total nonsense. Here I instinctively took a contrary view since I could see no way that an economy as primitive and diffuse, dispersed, as that of Vietnam could be materially damaged from the air. But before talking to President Kennedy, I expressed my comments to Secretary McNamara and his deputy, Roswell Gilpatrick, saying I was appalled at the report’s recommendation. We must not, I said, “commit forces to South Vietnam or we would find ourselves in a protracted conflict.” The French had learned, to their sorrow, that the Viet Cong were mean and tough, and there was always danger of provoking Chinese intervention, as we had done to our sorrow in Korea.

The following Tuesday, I raised the question with President Kennedy personally when he and I were alone together. I told him I strongly opposed the recommendation of the Taylor-Rostow mission. To commit American forces to South Vietnam would be, in my view, a tragic error. “Once the process started,” I said, “there would be no end to it. Within five years we’d have 300,000 men in the paddies and jungles and never find them again. That was the French experience. Vietnam was the worst possible terrain, both from a physical and political point of view.” Much to my surprise, however, I found the president in no mood to discuss the issue.

Source Information: This document is an excerpt adapted from an article titled “Last Testament of a Vietnam Dissenter,” by George Ball, from the *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Volume LVI, Spring 1994, pages 349–350. The article can be accessed online at http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/pulc/pulc_v_56_n_3.pdf.

Assessment Questions

1. Both documents describe Taylor and Rostow’s recommendations. What details about the Taylor-Rostow report does George Ball add (in Document 2) that are not in Document 1? Cite specific examples in your answer.
2. Both documents also describe George Ball’s opposition to the Taylor-Rostow recommendations. How does Document 1 help you better understand why Ball felt as he did about those recommendations? Cite specific details from Document 1.

The Vietnam War Assessment 7

Advanced Level

Teacher Instructions

Based on Common Core Reading Standard 7 for grades 9–12

★ *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

- 7. (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.
- 7. (11–12) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

★ *Using this Assessment*

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The Vietnam War: Assessment 7 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 7 for grades 9–10 and 11–12 combined. It asks students to do something historians must do all the time—integrate evidence found in a wide variety of primary sources presented in many visual and textual formats. It also asks them to judge the relative strengths and weaknesses of visual as compared with written sources.

★ *Evaluating Student Responses to this Assessment*

[This section is not available for review on sample pages]

The Vietnam War: Assessment 7

Directions: This exercise asks you to study three documents carefully and answer two questions focused on what these sources have in common. In order to better understand the documents and their importance as historical evidence, read and make use of the source information located just below or next to each document itself. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 7: (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text. **(11–12)** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Document 1: A Visual Primary Source



Source Information: On January 31, 1968, North Vietnam launched a major offensive. Over 80,000 Vietcong troops attacked more than 100 South Vietnamese cities and towns. It was during Vietnam's *Tet* New Year holiday. The attacks took the U.S. and its South Vietnamese allies by surprise. This map shows where the battles occurred. The Tet uprising was a major turning point in the Vietnam War.

Source: Hedberg, Betsy. *Vietnam War*. Backwards Planning Curriculum Units. Culver City, CA: Social Studies School Service, 2009.

Document 2: A Written Primary Source

Who won and who lost in the great Tet offensive against the cities? I'm not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout, but neither did we. . . . We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds. . . .

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion. On the off chance that military and political analysts are right, in the next few months we must test the enemy's intentions, in case this is indeed his last big gasp before negotiations. But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could. This is Walter Cronkite. Good night.

Source Information: This document is a portion of Walter Cronkite's famous "We Are Mired in Stalemate" broadcast of February 27, 1968. Cronkite was the CBS news anchor and probably America's most watched and trusted news source. This excerpt is included in James H. Willbanks's *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pages 205–206. It can be accessed at <http://books.google.com/books?id=jy3aJyxIKUsC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Document 3: A Written Primary Source

Tet was designed to influence American public opinion. We would attack poorly defended parts of South Vietnam cities during a holiday and a truce when few South Vietnamese troops would be on duty. Before the main attack, we would entice American units to advance close to the borders, away from the cities. By attacking all South Vietnam's major cities, we would spread out our forces and neutralize the impact of American firepower. Attacking on a broad front, we would lose some battles but win others. We used local forces nearby each target to frustrate discovery of our plans. Small teams, like the one which attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, would be sufficient. It was a guerrilla strategy of hit-and-run raids.

Our losses were staggering and a complete surprise. Giap later told me that Tet had been a military defeat, though we had gained the planned political advantages when Johnson agreed to negotiate and did not run for re-election. The second and third waves in May and September were, in retrospect, mistakes. Our forces in the South were nearly wiped out by all the fighting in 1968. It took us until 1971 to re-establish our presence, but we had to use North Vietnamese troops as local guerrillas. If the American forces had not begun to withdraw under Nixon in 1969, they could have punished us severely. We suffered badly in 1969 and 1970 as it was.

Source Information: Bui Tin served on the general staff of North Vietnam's army. In 1995, Stephen Young conducted an interview with Bui Tin and asked him for his assessment of the Tet uprising and its impact. This document is an excerpt adapted from that interview. The entire interview appeared on page A8 of *The Wall Street Journal* on August 3, 1995, with the title "How North Vietnam Won the War."

