

The Vietnam War

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 1-56004-280-X

Product Code: ZP318

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Introduction

Primary sources are the building blocks of history. Using these sources to introduce students to historical periods offers students the opportunity to become historians themselves—to analyze the evidence, form hypotheses, and learn how to support arguments based on evidence. They learn what it means to interpret the past in ways that provide meaning for the present. Textual primary sources can often be difficult for students to engage with because they are often couched in unfamiliar language from a different historical era. Visual primary sources can prove more appealing and accessible to students, and they also involve different types of “reading” skills.

How to Use This Product

This PowerPoint® presentation is designed to walk students through the process of primary source interpretation. Slides help to focus students’ attention and train them how to “read” visual primary sources. Targeted questions and enlarged insets from images help to train students to see deeper into the historical record, to uncover evidence that, though plainly before their eyes, is not always obvious at first glance.

The posters provide visual reinforcement for the images analyzed in the presentation. Use them before or after the PowerPoint® analysis for either pre- or post-reading activities. In addition, we have provided extra images on each disc so that once the students are trained in the skills of analyzing visual primary sources they can further hone their skills. You can print them out and distribute as handouts for in-class or independent study, or you can import the images into PowerPoint® for students to analyze individually or with the class as a whole.

Let Us Know What You Think

At Social Studies School Service, we always strive to provide the best supplemental curriculum materials at a superior value. If you have feedback that could help us improve this product, requests for other titles in this series, or stories of how it has helped your students, please let us know. You can e-mail us at access@socialstudies.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
Chief Education Officer
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The Vietnam War



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Prior to the 1950s, the nation of Vietnam was a French possession known as “Indochina.” The French and Vietnamese, with U.S. backing, had successfully resisted Japanese aggression during World War II, but an organization known as the “Viet Minh” had also arisen at this time and began pushing for independence from France. Led by Ho Chi Minh, a communist, the Viet Minh successfully defeated the French in 1954, and Vietnam was divided into two parts: the communist North and the U.S.-backed South.

The South Vietnamese government, under Premier Ngo Dinh Diem, became increasingly corrupt and popular discontent began to arise. The North Vietnamese backed a guerrilla insurgency, known as the Viet Cong, that aimed to overthrow Diem and establish communist rule in South Vietnam. As the fighting between North and South intensified in the early 1960s, President Kennedy sent more U.S. military advisors to help train the South Vietnamese forces. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, in which the U.S. claimed that North Vietnamese ships had attacked American destroyers, President Lyndon B. Johnson began to escalate U.S. involvement in the conflict, including bombing North Vietnam and sending in increasing numbers of American ground forces to fight the Viet Cong. Johnson had hoped the military escalation would quickly end the war, but fighting dragged on. The war became increasingly unpopular among Americans, and Johnson decided not to seek reelection in 1968.

The Vietnam War (continued)



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Richard Nixon became the new president in 1969 and initiated a policy of “Vietnamization,” in which South Vietnamese troops would be given more and more of the responsibility for conducting the war, and the U.S. would slowly begin to reduce the number of American soldiers in Vietnam. However, the war began to spread to the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos, and in 1970, Nixon authorized an invasion of Cambodia. Antiwar protests in the U.S., which had first arisen in the 1960s, had become more and more prevalent as the war dragged on. The invasion of Cambodia touched off a new round of protests, including one that turned tragic when National Guardsmen shot and killed four students at Kent State University in Ohio.

In 1973, U.S. and North Vietnamese diplomats agreed to a truce that eventually removed most U.S. forces. However, the North eventually reneged on the ceasefire, and by 1975, South Vietnam, weakened without the help of U.S. troops, was forced to surrender. The nation was unified with the capital at Hanoi; the city of Saigon, the former capital of South Vietnam, was renamed “Ho Chi Minh City.”

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Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

- Viet Minh fights war of independence
- French defeated at Dien Bien Phu
- Geneva Conference (1954)
- North becomes communist; South backed by U.S.
- U.S. military advisors sent to Vietnam to support South

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After World War II, France sought to reestablish colonial control over Indochina (a region which included the present-day nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). The Viet Minh, an independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh, sought to defeat the French and establish Vietnam as an independent nation. The Viet Minh eventually defeated the French, with the decisive battle taking place at the military outpost of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, France formally withdrew from Vietnam. However, representatives at the conference then divided Vietnam into two halves: the communist North, led by Ho Chi Minh, and a democratic South, led by Ngo Dinh Diem. The Eisenhower administration, concerned that if South Vietnam fell to the communists all of southeast Asia would follow suit, sent U.S. troops to advise the South Vietnamese forces. President John F. Kennedy continued this policy. However, after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, President Lyndon B. Johnson decided to escalate the war, eventually sending more than 500,000 U.S. combat troops to help stop North Vietnamese aggression.



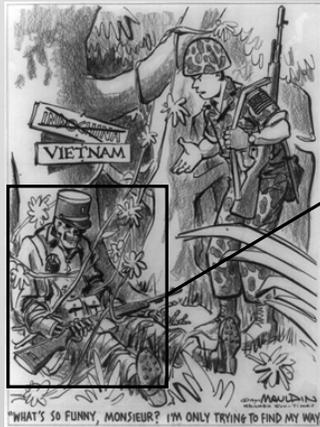
Dien Bien Phu and the Start of U.S. Involvement

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Give students approximately one minute to view the cartoon, then proceed to the following slides.

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- What is the nationality of this soldier?
- How can you tell?

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The soldier on the ground is a French soldier. His uniform is different than that of the other soldier, and the hat he is wearing is typical of someone who was in the French military. Also, the other soldier addresses him as “Monsieur” (French for “mister”). Finally, although it is difficult to see in the cartoon, it appears that a small French flag adorns the soldier’s hat.