

Vietnam War

Backwards Planning Curriculum Units

Betsy Hedberg, Writer

Dr. Aaron Willis, Project Coordinator
Justin Coffey, Editor
Kerry Gordonson, Editor

Social Studies School Service
10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232

<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com
(800) 421-4246

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10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432
Fax: (310) 839-2249

<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com

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How To Use This Unit

Backwards planning offers an innovative yet simple approach to meeting curriculum goals; it also provides a way to keep students engaged and focused throughout the learning process. Many teachers approach history instruction in the following manner: they identify a topic required by state and/or national standards, they find materials on that topic, they use those materials with their students, and then they administer some sort of standard test at the end of the unit. Backwards planning, rather than just starting with a required instructional topic, goes a step further by identifying exactly what students need to know by the end of the unit—the so-called “enduring understandings.” The next step involves assessment: devising ways to determine whether students have learned what they need to know. The final step involves planning the teaching/learning process so that students can acquire the knowledge needed.

This product uses backwards planning to combine a PowerPoint presentation, activities that involve authentic assessment, and traditional tests (multiple-choice and essay) into a complete curriculum unit. Although the materials have enough built-in flexibility that you can use them in a number of ways, we suggest the following procedure:

1. Start with the “essential questions” listed on slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation (these also appear in the teacher support materials). Briefly go over them with students before getting into the topic material. These questions will help students focus their learning and note taking during the course of the unit. You can also choose to use the essential questions as essay questions at the end of the unit; one way to do this is to let students know at the outset that one of the essential questions will be on the test—they just won’t know which one.
2. Next, discuss the activities students will complete during the unit. This will also help focus their learning and note taking, and it will lead them to view the PowerPoint presentation in a different light, considering it a source of ideas for authentic-assessment projects.
3. Present the PowerPoint to the class. Most slides have an image and bullet points summarizing the slide’s topic. The Notes page for each slide contains a paragraph or two of information that you can use as a presentation script, or just as background information for your own reference. You don’t need to present the entire PowerPoint at once: it’s broken up into several sections, each of which concludes with some discussion questions that echo parts of the essential questions and also help students to get closer to the “enduring understandings.” Spend some time with the class going over and debating these questions—this will not only help students think critically about the material, but it will also allow you to incorporate different modes of instruction during a single class period, offering a better chance to engage students.
4. Have students complete one or more of the authentic-assessment activities. These activities are flexible: most can be completed either individually or in groups, and either as homework or as in-class assignments. Each activity includes a rubric; many also have graphic organizers. You can choose to have students complete the activities after you have shown them the entire PowerPoint presentation, or you can show them one section of the PowerPoint, go over the discussion questions, and then have students complete an activity.

5. End the unit with traditional assessment. The support materials include a 20-question multiple-choice quiz; you can combine this with an essay question (you can use one of the essential questions or come up with one of your own) to create a full-period test.

6. If desired, debrief with students by going over the essential questions with them again and remind them what the enduring understandings are.

We are dedicated to continually improving our products and working with teachers to develop exciting and effective tools for the classroom. We can offer advice on how to maximize the use of the product and share others' experiences. We would also be happy to work with you on ideas for customizing the presentation.

We value your feedback, so please let us know more about the ways in which you use this product to supplement your lessons; we're also eager to hear any recommendations you might have for ways in which we can expand the functionality of this product in future editions. You can e-mail us at access@socialstudies.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
Chief Education Officer
Social Studies School Service



The Vietnam War

In the 20th century, Vietnam changed from a French colony to an independent nation, to a country divided politically and physically, and finally to a single nation under communist leadership. The role of the United States in this complex and difficult process remains controversial even more than 35 years after hostilities ended. Driven by the fear of communist expansion in southeast Asia, the U.S. government involved itself in Vietnamese affairs lightly at first, but unfolding events (and non-events) led four presidents to send material and hundreds of thousands of servicepersons to support a string of shaky South Vietnamese regimes. These increasing commitments put great strain not only on the members of the military, but also on the American public, which began to question with increasing force the goals and conduct of the war as it dragged on, as costs mounted, and as more and more friends and family members died. The war finally came to a brokered end only after years and years of horrific violence and tense negotiations; two years later, what the U.S. had wished to avoid from the outset—a communist-led, unified Vietnam—came to pass. Historians today examine the Vietnam War for a better understanding of its aims, its methods, its events, its mistakes, its worth, and its lasting effects on the American consciousness.

Essential Questions

- Was it possible for the United States to have definitively won the Vietnam War?
- What experiences did American soldiers undergo in Vietnam?
- How did the American public feel about the war in Vietnam, and how did these feelings change over time?
- What different perspectives did young people take regarding the Vietnam War at the time? What might have been some of the reasons for these opinions?
- In what ways was the Vietnam War a defining event for an entire generation of Americans?

Indochina

- Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia
- Mountainous terrain
- Deltas:
 - Red River (north)
 - Mekong (south)
- Tropical rainforests



Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are southeast Asian countries in the region its French colonists named *Indochine*, or Indochina. Today, these independent countries have become increasingly popular travel destinations for Americans and Europeans. For much of the 20th century, this region remained mired in war. During the 1960s and 1970s, an intense and protracted conflict between the United States and Vietnam spilled over into neighboring Laos and Cambodia.

Vietnam is a mountainous country with dense tropical rainforests. Most of its population lives in one of two relatively flat and fertile river deltas: the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong River Delta in the south. A mountain range runs from north to south along Vietnam's western border with Laos and Cambodia. Lying in the tropical rainforest ecozone, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia experience high humidity, frequent heavy rainfall, and very hot temperatures in the lowlands. The rainforests provide homes for a vast variety of animal species, including many insects and snakes. The density of its forests has made much of the region difficult terrain for human travel and habitation.

Vietnam in the Mid-20th Century



Ho Chi Minh in 1945

- French colony from late 19th century to WWII
- Japan invaded in WWII
- Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh led independence movement
- Democratic Republic of Vietnam
- Power vacuum

After a thousand years of Chinese rule, Vietnam became a nation-state in the 10th century. From the late 19th century until World War II, France ran Vietnam as a colony. Japan invaded Vietnam during World War II but kept the French in place as a puppet government to provide administrative help.

While the Japanese controlled Vietnam, the communist Vietnamese nationalist Ho Chi Minh returned from 20 years abroad to help organize an independence movement. Born in Vietnam, Ho had lived in France, England, the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China, before returning to his native country. In France, he had joined the communist party and had become involved in efforts to remove France from Vietnam.

Beginning in 1941, Ho led the Viet Minh, an independence movement that took military action against the Vichy French (the French government under Nazi occupation) and the Japanese in Vietnam. The U.S. secretly supported the Viet Minh. At the end of World War II, Ho declared Vietnamese independence, calling the new country the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Unrecognized by any country, newly independent Vietnam found itself lacking a cohesive government. British troops entered the southern part of the country to disarm the Japanese. After British withdrawal, Chinese troops under the direction of Chiang Kai-shek entered northern Vietnam to oust the Japanese there. Non-communist Vietnamese wanted to control the government, while France wanted to reestablish its colonial authority. Vietnam therefore faced competing demands for leadership and did not fall under any one clear command.

The First Indochina War

- Ho Chi Minh declared independence in 1945; received U.S. support
- War with France broke out in 1947
- Vietnam received assistance from communist China
- U.S. supported France



French soldiers in combat in Indochina, 1953

In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam independent from France. The United States joined in the celebration, flying war planes over Hanoi and standing by as a Vietnamese band played the “Star-Spangled Banner.” Officials noted the warm relations between the United States and the new country of Vietnam.

Despite this declaration, the French did not immediately leave Vietnam. In 1947, the Viet Minh entered a full-scale war with France in an attempt to drive out the colonial power for good and establish communist control. The French called this war the “First Indochina War”; the Vietnamese called it the “French War.” The war raged for almost ten years, with communist China becoming increasingly involved in providing aid to the Viet Minh. Under China’s guidance, the Viet Minh staged a bloody land-reform campaign against the French.

During the First Indochina War, the United States ended its support for Ho and the Viet Minh, denouncing the communist group and its leader. Instead, the U.S. supported the Vietnamese government that the French had fashioned, under the leadership of Bao Dai. The French considered this government officially a part of the French Union, though no longer a colony. The U.S. also gave strong military support to France, paying for nearly one-third of the war’s cost by 1952.