

The Vietnam War, 1969–1975

Teacher Pages

Overview

This activity is designed to reinforce and expand students' prior knowledge of the last few years of the Vietnam War. Students familiarize themselves with southeast Asia in the 1970s, identifying countries at war and countries that were neutral. Students then identify various U.S. military strategies designed to prevent a takeover of South Vietnam by forces from the North. The class also discusses the rationales behind some of these strategies.

Time Required

30–50 minutes

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical comprehension

United States Era 9 Standard 2: How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics

National Geography Standards

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

Standard 2: How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

Standard 3: How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface

Enduring Understanding

The United States waged a multifaceted military strategy against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong in trying to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam in the last few years of the Vietnam War.

Essential Question

What military tactics did the U.S. use against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong in the last few years of the Vietnam War to try to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam?

Procedure

Note: The following directions are written for a whole-class activity. If you wish, you may instead use the student handout and have students work individually or in small groups on the activity.

1. Distribute the outline version of the map to students. Ask them to identify the following countries on the map and color or outline each of them in a different color: Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam.
2. Turn on the “Countries” layer. Have students check their maps for accuracy and make any necessary changes.
3. Ask students to identify which countries were at war and which countries were neutral. (Only North and South Vietnam were officially at war.)
4. Read the “Historical Context” section to the class to set the stage for the activity. Make sure students understand the words and terms in bold.
5. Using a whiteboard, projector, or another display device, show the class the “The Vietnam War, 1969–1975” map, but with all layers except the following turned off: “Cities,” “Gulfs/sea,” “Rivers,” and “Lake.”
6. With them working either individually or in small groups, have students do the following:
 - a. Have students draw in the approximate route of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Ask what its significance was.
 - b. Next, turn on the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” layer. Have students check their maps for accuracy and make any necessary changes.
 - c. Ask students how the U.S. first attempted to stop infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. See if they remember that the U.S. initiated several bombing raids at different points along the trail.
 - d. Next, turn on the “Areas bombed” layer. Have students check their maps for accuracy and make any necessary changes.
 - e. Ask students why they think so much of this bombing took place in countries like Cambodia and Laos. (Much of the Ho Chi Minh Trail ran through those countries.)
 - f. Now, ask students whether the bombing was effective. See if they remember what the U.S. and South Vietnam did next.
 - g. Turn on the “U.S. and South Vietnamese offensive” layer. Have students check their maps for accuracy and make any necessary changes.
 - h. Ask students why they think U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invaded these neutral countries. (The same strategy as the bombing raids; to stop enemy infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.)
 - i. Now, ask students how United States brought the war into North Vietnam. See if they remember that the U.S. mined Haiphong harbor and bombed Hanoi. Ask students to speculate what the U.S. was hoping to achieve with this strategy. (It

was hoped that bombing North Vietnam cities and mining the harbor would damage the North's industrial and transportation facilities, degrade its ability to fight a war, and demoralize the population.)

- j. Turn on the "U.S. mines Haiphong harbor" and "Hanoi bombing (1972)" layers and have the students mark these on their maps.

Historical Context

The Vietnam War took place at the height of the **Cold War** when the military and economic might of both the United States and the Soviet Union dictated world events. After World War II, Vietnam was divided nearly in half along the 17th parallel. A **demilitarized zone (DMZ)** was established along this line, separating the Soviet-supported North from the American-supported South. Originally, U.S. involvement was considered to be a "**police action**" to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam. As the North Vietnamese Army and the **Viet Cong** (an **insurgency militia** based primarily in the South) increased pressure on the South Vietnam government, America became more and more involved in the war. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army **infiltrated** South Vietnam through the **Ho Chi Minh Trail** (named after the leader of North Vietnam) and conducted hit-and-run attacks on nearly every U.S. military base in South Vietnam. As the war raged on into the 1970s, it became apparent to many Americans that this was not a winnable war.

Assessment

Have students create a chart or graphic organizer in which they detail the progression of the military tactics the U.S. used against North Vietnam in the last few years of the Vietnam War. They should describe the reasoning behind the tactics and then assess how well they think the tactic worked.

Extensions

1. Have students research in more detail the overall U.S. political and military strategy during the last few years of Vietnam War. They should look into tactics such as "Vietnamization," the bombing campaigns in North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the use of Agent Orange, and others. Have students describe the objective of the tactic and its goal, and then evaluate its effectiveness.
2. Have students look at the early beginnings of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, beginning with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Have students look at how U.S. involvement grew in the atmosphere of the Cold War, then create a timeline detailing major events of the Vietnam War.