How can we say "Never Forget" and mean it?

RETHINKING THE TEACHING OF THE VIETNAM WAR

Curriculum and Workshop by Hannah Nguyen
MAT - Urban Education & Social Justice
CA-NAMIE Ethnic Studies Conference 2018
CHALK TALK: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER LEARNING ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR?

RESPOND
Add your response to the Chalk Talk prompt to an empty space on the board.

REACT
React to others' responses by adding your comments, questions, checks, etc.

RELATE
Draw connections between related responses and extend the conversation.
What memories of the learning about the War resonated with you most?

Reflecting on your own memory of the War, what worked well? What could have been done differently?
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Workshop Outline

1. Unit Overview & Sample
2. "Echoes of Vietnam" Lesson Activities
3. Resource Sharing & Questions
The Vietnam War
IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET
DIFFICULT TO REMEMBER
All wars are fought twice, one time on the battlefield, the second time in memory. History has an afterlife in memory.

DR. VIET THANH NGUYEN
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for The Sympathizer
Essential Questions

- How can we say "never forget" and mean it?
- Why do we forget? Why does memory matter?
- How can we honor the memory of those who lived and died during the War?
The narrative on Vietnam, its people, and the War is told from an ethnocentric perspective that centers American self-interest and limits Vietnamese identity to a war. This incomplete memory of the War led to America “[kicking] the Vietnam syndrome once and for all”, as President George H.W. Bush proudly declared at the close of the Persian Gulf War and Desert Storm...

Since then, we have seen America continue to involve itself in the military operations and destabilization of countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, indicating instead a reluctance to confront the devastating legacy of the Vietnam War, to say “never forget” and mean it.
Part 1
Assessment

StoryCorps Interview

This part focuses on honoring personal memory of the War through oral history. Students interview members of their community who have memories of the War. Interviews will be archived in the Library of Congress and transcribed for Part 2.
Part 2

Assessment

"Echoes of Vietnam" Exhibit

Students share their historical analysis and honor the memory of the War through the creation of an interactive multimedia museum exhibit. Members of the school community will be invited to take part in this celebration of student work and remembrance of this chapter in our history.
01 Who are the Vietnamese?
02 Unit Introduction
03 What is the Vietnam War?
04 What is Memory?
05 Memory As Personal
06 Memory As Political
07 Remembering the War
08 Forgetting the War
09 Honoring Memory
10 "Echoes of Vietnam"
LESSON 1

"Vietnam is a country, not a war." — Unknown

EQ: Why are we starting a unit about the Vietnam War talking about the Vietnamese people?

Activities: Carousel/Gallery Walk & Concentric Circles

LESSON 2

"Whether I like it or not, the Vietnam War is my war, too." — Thanh Tan

EQ: Why is it important to look at different perspectives or memories of historical events?

Activities: Critical Lenses on Media & Give One, Get One

LESSON 3

"The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit." — Dr. MLK Jr.

EQ: Why is it important to look beyond the "master narrative"?

Activities: Primary Source Analysis & Layered Timeline Co-Construction
LESSON 4

"History is a people's memory." — Malcolm X

EQ: Why do we forget? Why does memory matter?
Activities: Quickwrite & Concept Mindmaps

LESSON 5

"Listen. Honor. Share." — StoryCorps

EQ: How is memory personal?
Activities (Day 1): Guest Speaker Panel + Q&A
Activities (Day 2): StoryCorps Workshop & Interview Editing/Roleplay
LESSON 6

"This industry of memory is more than simply storytelling, but it's integrated with the military-industrial complex." — Dr. Viet Nguyen
EQ: How is memory used as a political resource?
Activities: Hollywood Industrial Complex & Small Group Film Analysis

LESSON 7

"Every memorial in its time has a different goal." — Maya Lin
EQ: How and why do we remember collectively?
Activities: Four Corners, Learning Stations, & Monument Design Proposals

LESSON 8

"History doesn't repeat itself. It rhymes." — Unknown
EQ: How and why do we forget collectively?
Activities: Speech Annotation, NYT Covers Analysis, & Letter to Bush
**LESSON 9**

“When Americans talk about the Vietnam War, they only talk about themselves.” — Ken Burns

**EQ:** How can we honor the memory of those who lived through the Vietnam War?

**Activities:** Cross the Line & Fishbowl Discussion

**LESSON 10**

“All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory. History has an afterlife in memory.”

—Dr. Viet Thanh Nguyen

**EQ:** How can we say "never forget" and mean it?

**Activities:** Independent and Group Work Time for Exhibition
Echoes of the Vietnam War

HISTORY IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT STORY.
Photo Analysis: Freewrite

Write
Freely write down your thoughts in response to the writing prompts.

Pick
Choose 2-3 of your strongest words and phrases from your freewrite.

Find
Find classmates with the same photo and put your writing together to create...
• What do you see?
• If you were in the photo, what might you hear? smell? feel?
• Are there people? What are they saying? What are they doing?
• What do you think is happening?
• What words come to mind when you free this?
• How would you describe this photo to another person?
• What are you wondering about the photo?
PHOTO ANALYSIS: FREEWRITE

WRITE
Freely write down your thoughts in response to the writing prompts.

PICK
Choose 2-3 of your strongest words and phrases from your freewrite.

FIND
Find classmates with the same photo and put your writing together to create a found poem.
Browse the Gallery

1. Post up your photo and poetry lines.
2. Read other poems and look at other photos.
3. Return to your seat when done.
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Master Narrative

The master narrative is defined as the stories that have traditionally dominated the history taught in schools.
Vietnam War Background

- Longest war in American history (15 years)
- First war to be shown by the media
- Shift from conventional warfare to guerilla warfare
- Part of the Cold War
  - Fear of expansion of communism
  - Domino theory - if one country falls to communism, the surrounding ones would follow (Eisenhower)
- Official Dates: 1955-1975
- Communists vs. Anti-Communists
Communist

- North Vietnam
- Viet Cong
- China

Anti-Communist

- South Vietnam
- ARVN
- United States
Escalation to War

- French Colony since 1887
- Japanese invasion in WWII
- First Indochina War (Anti-French Resistance War)
  - French surrendered in 1954 - VN independent
- Temporary Division of Vietnam at 1954 Geneva Accords
  - Communist North vs. Non-communist South
  - Election to be held in 1956 to establish unified government
- Eisenhower didn’t want reunification to result in Communist VN
  - Supported emerging South VN leader - Ngo Dinh Diem
Counter Narrative

The counter narrative resists the dominant discourse by sharing multiple accounts of history and personal narratives that make up a vivid human history.
SECONDARY SOURCE

Facts & Figures about Vietnamese refugees:

- Those who could afford to left Vietnam via airlift immediately after the War ended on April 30, 1975
- Those from poorer backgrounds escaped by boat - known as Vietnamese "boat people"
- Over 2 million Vietnamese people left Vietnam in the 20 years following the official end of the Vietnam War - about 1.5 million "boat people"
- Only about 800,000 survived the journey from Vietnam to refugee camps in Southeast Asia and then to Western countries like the US.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Listen to the stories of two Vietnamese refugees that were interviewed by Ms. Nguyen. Highlight or react to any of the quotes on your copy of these narratives. You can also take notes on the handout provided.
What was it like growing up during the War?
What happened after the War was over?
How did you escape?
What was the escape like?
Why did you want to come to America?
SECONDARY SOURCE

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We belong to history before history belongs to us.

UNKNOWN
Why is it important to look beyond the *Master Narrative*?
HONORING THE

Echoes of Vietnam

THROUGH ART
**MASTER VS. COUNTER NARRATIVE:**
**HONORING VOICE THROUGH ART**

**READ**
In groups, read the master narrative secondary source and counter narrative primary source for your photograph.

**REACT**
Record your reactions to the sources on the worksheet as you discuss the questions in your group.

**CREATE**
Using the words from the sources, create either a blackout poem or word collage to honor the memory of this photograph.
True Me waiting:

Fuck what you have heard or what you have been in your son. He may be short on homework and laugh when the teacher calls home. He may curse his teacher, propose arsenic for the whole public system. But inside is the same sense that was in me. None of us ever want to fail. None of us want to be unworthy, to not measure up.

ta-nehisi coates

anyone can Scribble out words

the clever part is knowing which words to leave
ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?

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Thank You!

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