



The Living Room War: Television & Vietnam

Pre-Visit Activities:

Part 1: Vocabulary

Go over the vocabulary list provided. Before the class, students should become familiar with these words and concepts because they will be referenced in the footage screened.

Amnesty: The act of an authority (such as a government) by which pardon is granted to a large group of individuals

Booby trap: In warfare, a device such as a land mine or grenade placed in a noncombat area meant to harm soldiers

Capitalism: An economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled and which is characterized by competition and the profit motive

Communism: A theory advocating elimination of private property; a system in which goods are owned in common and are available to all as needed; a totalitarian system of government in which a single authoritarian party controls state-owned means of production

Conscientious objector: A person who is granted official, legal exemption from serving in the military on the basis of moral or religious grounds

DMZ (Demilitarized Zone): In military terms, a demilitarized zone is an area, usually the frontier or boundary between two or more groups, where military activity is not permitted, usually by treaty or other agreement

Draft: Compulsory military service

Draftee: Person selected from the eligible general population to fight a war

Draft-dodger: Someone who illegally evades the draft, often by leaving the country

Intermingled areas: Areas where it was impossible to tell who was a Vietcong sympathizer and who was a South Vietnamese loyalist

Grunts: Foot soldiers/recruits

KIA, WIA, MIA: Killed in action, wounded in action, missing in action

Lifers: Career military men, officers

Lottery: The process that determines the order of selection in the military draft, usually correlated by birthday

Selective service: A system under which men are called up for military service

Strategic hamlets: Transplanted villages of South Vietnamese supposedly free of Vietcong influence, guarded by Marines who lived in the villages

Tet Offensive: The 1968 offensive by the Vietcong to take over South Vietnam and expel the Americans

VC, Victor Charlie, or Vietcong: Three names for the North Vietnamese soldiers/guerrillas



Part 2: Oral History Interview

Ask students to select an interview subject who was alive during the Vietnam War era (1965-75). This person should be at least forty-five years of age and could be a family member, friend, teacher, or school administrator.

Ask students to use the questionnaire (see attached) to guide their interviews. The first four blanks relate to data gathering. Those that follow are open-ended in order to reveal the subject's thoughts, opinions, and memories of the war.

The goal of this interview is to provide students with a personalized account of this historical era. We will begin the class by having students share some of what they learned in their interviews.

Interview Form

Your name: _____ Date: _____

Select an interview subject who was alive during the Vietnam War era (1965-75). The person should be at least forty-five years old and could be a family member, friend, teacher, or school administrator. If necessary, use extra paper to record your answers.

Name of subject: _____

Your relation to subject: _____

Ask your subject the following questions:

How old were you in 1969? _____

Have you ever served in the military? _____

What is your most vivid memory of the Vietnam War era? _____

How were you involved in or affected by the Vietnam War? _____



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CLASS PROGRAM

What was your opinion of the Vietnam War during the conflict? Did it change over the course of the war? If so, when and why?

What images or events do you remember watching on television about the Vietnam War?



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Post-Visit Activity:

Listen

Introduce students to music that was popular during the Vietnam War era. Begin by playing a song such as “I Feel Like I’m Fixin to Die Rag,” performed by Country Joe and the Fish in 1967. Then explore how it relates to the war. What sentiments about the war are expressed? How does the songwriter feel about the conflict? How do you think the song might have affected listeners at the time it was written?

Next, select a song that is less literal, such as “We Gotta Get Out of This Place,” performed by the Animals in 1965. Discuss how this song relates to the era and its similarities and differences to the first one. Why do you think this song may have been popular with the grunts (soldiers) in Vietnam? Why do you think music was so important to them?

Research

Each student should create a three-song playlist that relates to the Vietnam experience. For example, one list could include “Give Peace a Chance” (John Lennon, 1969), “Fortunate Son” (Credence Clearwater Revival, 1969), and “What’s Going On” (Marvin Gaye, 1971). Playlists can be written up or burned on a CD.

Each list should include the name of the artist, title, and year. Students should write a paragraph for each song that describes why they selected it and how it relates to the Vietnam War. Encourage students to use quotes from these lyrics to support their own thoughts about the war.

To find this music, students can ask their interview subjects (or other adults who lived during that time) for suggestions, or do research at the library or on the Internet.

Helpful websites include:

www.allmusic.com (search by artist)

www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/vietnam/vietnam_music.cfm

Compile

Once students complete their playlists, bring everyone together to share their selections. After discussing individual choices, ask the group to create a class list of ten songs or more. This playlist should include each song’s title, artist, and year of release, and should provide a rationale for each choice. A final option might be for students to create a CD of the Vietnam-era songs selected by the class.

The Paley Center for Media would love to hear about your selections! Please forward us your class playlist or CD, along with a rationale for your picks. E-mail us at DistanceLearningNY@mtr.org.