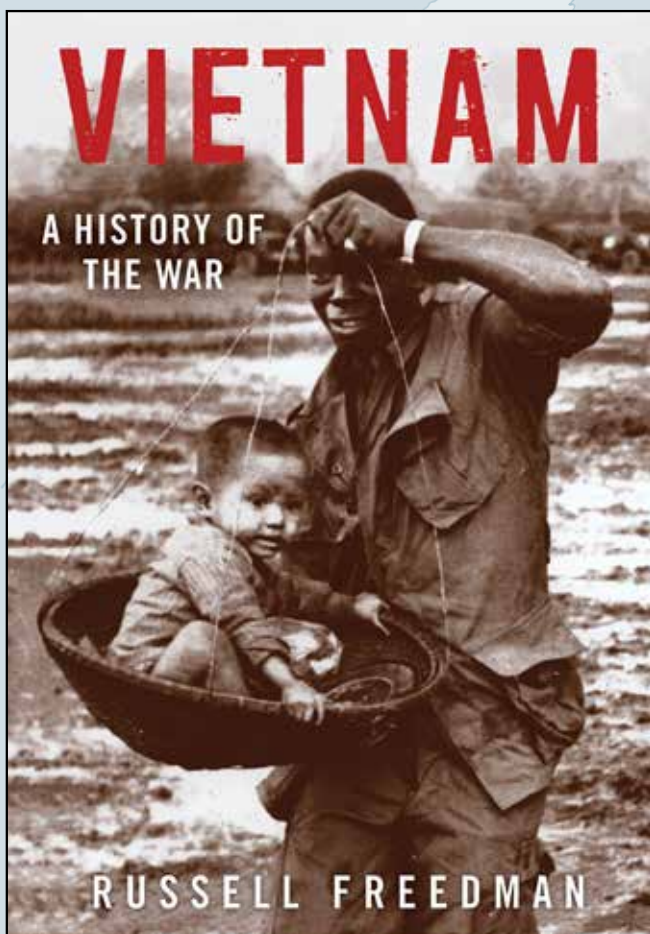


Holiday House Educator's Guide

Instructional
Standards



HC: 978-0-8234-3658-3 • Ages 10 up

Illustrated with photographs. Includes a glossary, source notes, a bibliography and index.

Vietnam

A History of a War
RUSSELL FREEDMAN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Newbery Medalist Russell Freedman's *Vietnam* is a concise history of the protracted and controversial war in Indochina.

Few Americans had ever heard of the small country in Southeast Asia called Vietnam until Ho Chi Minh began his efforts to free his country from French colonial rule. His struggle led him to communism, and instead of a united Vietnam his people were split. The United States government was engaged in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the idea that another country would fall to communism was frightening to our nation's leaders. Without an official declaration of war and against the protests of many American citizens, the American military was sent to battle the Vietcong in the jungles, hamlets and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in South Vietnam. As the war extended into decades and military casualties escalated, U.S. leaders were faced with questions: How can we end this war without admitting defeat? Is this about power or people?

#VIETNAM



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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find out about the following: democracy, communism, fascism.

Instruct them to write a brief paper that explains the differences in these types of governments. How do these differences contribute to wars and conflicts and the struggle for power?

W. 5-8.2, 5-8.4, 5-8.7; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

Classroom Discussion

- “The last man to die in Vietnam” is the title of chapter 1. How is this a powerful beginning to a book that deals with such a controversial war? Explain “Reconciliation,” the title of the last chapter. How does this bring readers’ understanding of the war full circle?
- Many people felt that the war in Vietnam was “betraying the democratic and humanitarian values that Americans held dear” (p. 1). What “democratic values” were these Americans referencing? What were the humanitarian issues? Debate whether this argument might also apply to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- John Kerry, a decorated naval officer, gave a passionate speech against the war to the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee. How did Congress and the Executive Branch of the government receive his antiwar testimony? Why did he call the war “criminal hypocrisy”? Discuss how John Kerry’s views toward the war shaped his political career as a senator from Massachusetts and as President Obama’s Secretary of State.
- Explain this Vietnamese proverb: “Although we have been at times strong, at times weak, we have at no time lacked heroes” (p. 6). What were the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnam? Who were the heroes in North and South Vietnam? How did these heroes turn into their country’s “weakness”? Apply this proverb to the United States during the Vietnam War. What were the nation’s strengths and weaknesses? Who were the heroes?
- What were the views of the peasants toward foreign invaders? Debate the attitude of the French toward the Vietnamese people. What hardships did the Vietnamese face under French “colonial rule”? How did the French contribute to Ho Chi Minh’s rise to power? Explain why some people thought his political activism was “mocking the world” (p. 13).
- What were President Roosevelt’s thoughts about Ho Chi Minh? Why was Ho so interested in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights of the United States? How might the language in these documents support what he initially wanted for his country? Ho said, “It was patriotism and not communism that originally inspired me” (p. 14). Why did he migrate toward communism?
- Colonel Archimedes L. A. Patti, head of Office of Strategic Services operations in Vietnam, was convinced that Ho was sincere. At what point did Ho and the United States become enemies? How did Colonel Patti think that the United States could have avoided the war?

- Discuss the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. How did it create fear among some Americans? Explain how this fear created paranoia about communist rule, even in small countries like Vietnam. Debate whether Vietnam was ever a threat to the United States.
- President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked American allies for “united action” in Vietnam. Why was his request rejected? Explain Eisenhower’s “domino theory.” How did his theory prove to be a “mirage”?
- President John F. Kennedy sent the Green Berets to Vietnam as military advisers. How did the Vietnamese receive these advisers? Why was this military strategy a failure? What could the advisers have done differently?
- President Lyndon B. Johnson did not want to surrender South Vietnam to communism and called on Congress for support. Congress never officially declared war in Vietnam but handed Johnson a “blank check” to conduct the war as he saw fit. How did this escalate the war? Discuss how the war contributed to Johnson’s decision not to run for a second term as president.
- What was Johnson’s view of the protesters who stormed the capitol on April 17, 1965? How did this prompt him to conduct Operation Chaos, a domestic spying project? Discuss how the First Amendment supports the right of citizens to protest.
- General Westmoreland changed his view toward the war and wanted to negotiate with the North Vietnamese. How did this create a conflict with Johnson? Contrast Westmoreland and Johnson’s views regarding nuclear weapons.
- Who were the “wise men”? What was their view of the war? At the end of March 1968, President Johnson ordered a halt to the bombing in Vietnam. He said he did it in the name of “national unity.” Debate whether this made him a hero or a coward in the eyes of military leaders and citizens at home.
- President Richard M. Nixon declared that he had a secret plan to end the war. At what point did the nation learn that there was no such plan? Nixon wanted “peace with honor.” Debate whether there was ever “honor” in this war.
- There are always civilian fatalities in war, but the massacre in the hamlets of My Lai and My Khe at the hands of some American military units was barbaric. Debate the conviction of Lieutenant William Calley. Why did Nixon step in and demand that Calley be released from army custody? How did the massacre contribute to low morale among the military?
- Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, reversed his support of the war and said, “We were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why” (p. 127). How does Freedman explain why in this book?

RI. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3, 5-8.4, 5-8.8; RH. 6-8.1, 6-8.9; SL. 5-8.4, 5-8.6; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.3

Curriculum Connections

LANGUAGE ARTS

- Ronald Reagan called the war in Vietnam a “noble cause.” Tell students that an editorial states an opinion about an important issue and supports the opinion with known facts. Have them write a newspaper editorial that addresses one of the following questions: Was the war a mistake? Was it a “noble cause”?

W. 5-8.3; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

- Write an essay that interprets the following quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: “The Great Society has been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.” What is the Great Society? How was it shot down? Explain how this quote supports Martin Luther King Jr.’s philosophy of peace.

W. 5-8.1; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

- Write a letter that a soldier in Vietnam may have written to John Kerry thanking him for his testimony before the Congressional Foreign Relations Committee in opposition to the war in Vietnam.

W. 5-8.3; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

SOCIAL STUDIES

- How is a conflict different from a war? Consider the information that Freedman gives about the United States military operations in Vietnam, and sponsor a class debate about whether our nation was at war with Vietnam or involved in a conflict.

SL. 5-8.4; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.3

- Take a look at the political cartoon on p. 86. How does it represent public opinion toward the war in Vietnam? Then create a political cartoon that might have appeared in newspapers on March 29, 1973, the day the last combat troops left Vietnam. Instruct students to write a paragraph on the back of the cartoon that explains its meaning.

W. 5-8.2, 5-8.7; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

- Take a virtual fieldtrip to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (www.nps.gov/vive/index.htm). Write an essay that explains why the wall of veteran names is called “The Wall That Heals.”

W. 5-8.1; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.3

SCIENCE/HEALTH

- Many soldiers returning from Vietnam suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Others developed catastrophic illnesses from exposure to Agent Orange. Divide the class into two groups and have one group develop a PowerPoint presentation on the symptoms and treatment of PTSD, and the other a presentation on Agent Orange and its effect on veterans and their families. Include a slide about the responsibility of the Veterans Administration in aiding suffering veterans.

W. 5-8.3, 5-8.5, 5-8.6, 5-8.7; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.3

MUSIC

- There were a number of songs written and performed to protest the war in Vietnam. “Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan was one of the most famous. Read the lyrics (www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/blowininthewind.html) and write an essay that explains why it’s a protest song.

W. 5-8.1, 5-8.7; L. 5-8.1, 5-8.2, 5-8.3

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

- Students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from context. Such words may include: *carnage* (p. 2), *subsistence* (p.9), *speculators* (p. 11), *conscripted* (p. 11), *stoker* (p. 12), *confiscated* (p. 17), *medicinal* (p. 19), *uncanny* (p. 21), *abdicated* (p. 23), *strafed* (p. 28), *seismic* (p. 29), *containment* (p. 30), *insurrections* (p.31), *ponderous* (p. 35), *imminent* (p. 48), *coup* (p. 48), *repressive* (p. 50), *infiltrate* (p. 51), *imperialists* (p. 53), *acrimonious* (p. 60), *subverting* (p. 69), *circumventing* (p. 69), *omnipotent* (p. 74), *quagmire* (p. 75), *annihilation* (p. 78), *attrition* (p. 91), *ruthlessness* (p. 96), *stalemate* (p. 98), *dereliction* (p. 106), *fragging* (p. 109), *salient* (p. 110), *camaraderie* (p. 111).

L. 5-8.4

VIETNAM 1964–1973



Map © Map Resources

Related Internet Resources

The History Channel: Vietnam War History

www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history

The History Channel presents an article on the Vietnam War.

The History Channel: Vietnam War Protests

www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests

The History Channel discusses the Vietnam War protest movement.

Kent May 4 Center

www.may4.org

This site is dedicated to the killings of the students at Kent State.



Photo Credit: Evans Chan

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RUSSELL FREEDMAN is well known for his riveting biographies and masterful accounts of the history of the United States. One of the most honored writers for children, his many awards include the Newbery Medal, three Newbery Honors, the National Humanities Medal, the Sibert Medal, the Orbis Pictus Award, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for a “substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children.” Mr. Freedman lives in New York City and travels widely to research his books.

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.