

Veterans Day
America at War
Grades: 8-12

Social Studies
w/ *Interdisciplinary Connections*

Overview of Lesson Plan:

In this lesson, students will view two DVDs – one about D-Day, the invasion of Normandy during WW II, and the other is about the Vietnam conflict and the men who served during that era. They will learn about the similarities and differences between those conflicts and the experiences of the GIs who served in each. Both DVDs tell the story of the veterans from a complimentary perspective. They were written to help young people understand why it is important to honor and thank our veterans.

Pre-Assessment:

Share with students the significance of a strong national defense in the preservation of freedom. Indicate that whatever your personal feelings are regarding the military and war, it is necessary for a free society to protect and defend itself against those who would take our freedoms. Contrast the American reaction to the GIs who served during World War II and were welcomed home with ticker tape parades and national adulation with the experiences of the Vietnam veterans, who were called baby killers and portrayed as unstable or even crazy in the national media.

Videos:

D-Day: A Crowning Glory

Vietnam: A Nation Remembers

Each video is 12-15 minutes long and can be viewed separately or together.

Suggested Time Allowance: 60+ minutes for videos and classroom discussion.

Discussion topics after video presentations:

D-Day:

Why was the invasion of Normandy necessary?

Why was Eisenhower taking a risk by implementing “Operation Overlord”?

Why did the soldiers storm the beaches even though they knew there were German machine guns positioned all along the shore?

Would you have the courage to race across the beach toward the enemy?

What do you think these men talked and thought about as they sailed toward Normandy?

Do you realize that these young men were just about your age?

Are these men heroes? Why?

What would you be willing to do to preserve freedom at home and around the world?

What might have happened if the Invasion of Normandy had failed?

Vietnam:

Why did America get involved in Vietnam?

How long did the Vietnam conflict last?

Why did much of America turn against the military – and how did it affect the men who served?

How would you feel if you went away to do a job and then came home to people calling you names and throwing things at you?

Should Americans have blamed the soldiers for the war? Why?

How do wars get started? Who makes the decision to go to war? Do soldiers have a choice as to where or whether they fight?

Discuss the “Hippies” versus the soldiers. What did each group claim to stand for? How did the “Hippies” express their lack of support for the war? Were they right or wrong?

Discuss how soldiers might actually make it possible for protestors to protest a war.

What might have happened to the Vietnam protestors if they had been in Russia or another country that does not have America’s level of freedom?

Home viewing (with parental permission):

Saving Private Ryan (as a partner to the D-Day video)

The Longest Day (tamer viewing if parents prefer to avoid the violence of *Saving Private Ryan*)

We Were Soldiers (as a partner to the Vietnam video)

Post Assessment:

1. Ask students to pick either World War II or Vietnam and write a letter to a veteran of the conflict. The letter should ask questions of the veteran and about his involvement in the conflict. The letter will be graded on grammar, punctuation, knowledge of the conflict, and originality of questions. The National Military History Center and/or American Veterans Institute will provide names of actual veterans unless the student already has one to whom he/she would like to write.
2. Have students write a paper contrasting the public attitude toward returning veterans during World War II versus the public attitude during the Vietnam era. For extra credit, have the student discuss public reaction to today’s returning troops. Is it more like World War II or Vietnam? Explain why.
2. As a class, discuss some of the key battles in World War II (D-Day, Battle of the Bulge etc.) and Vietnam (Ia Drang Valley, Easter Invasion, etc.). If the class has not yet covered these conflicts, you can select other famous battles such as Waterloo, The Alamo, The Battle at Little Big Horn, The Chosin Reservoir, Bull Run, Gettysburg, The Battle of Bunker Hill, or The Trojan War. Divide students into groups of four, each group choosing a battle to research. Then, groups will divide into pairs, with each pair researching one of the countries involved in the battle. Each pair researches the following questions:
 - What were the strengths and weaknesses of this country's military in this battle?
 - What were the uniform and standard weapons of this country's military?
 - What type of tactics and strategies were used by this military?
 - What famous people from this country were involved in this battle?
 - What was the outcome of the battle and why?
 - How were individual lives effected and shaped by this battle?

Pairs reconvene with their group and report their information. Groups prepare a visual presentation (a poster, a live reenactment, a diorama, a video, etc.) depicting the battle and incorporating all of the information from their research. Students have the option to dress up for their presentation, etc.

Resources / Materials:

- student journals
- pens/pencils
- paper
- addresses of veterans of WW II or Vietnam
- classroom board
- computers with Internet access
- library access
- video equipment, costumes or presentation materials

Evaluation / Assessment:

Students will be evaluated on thoroughness, quality, accuracy of letters, journals, and reports, as well as participation in class discussion, participation in group research and preparation, and presentation of visual depictions of their group's historic battle.

Extension Activities:

1. Research the life of a military figure (famous or lesser known – just as long as you have access to information about the individual's life). Dress up like this person and perform a monologue for your class telling about your life and the important battles in which you took part.
2. Research the organization of America's military (or one branch of the military). Create a poster charting its ranking system, including pictures of different uniforms, different symbols for each rank, and a brief description of the duties of each position.
3. Prepare a journal as though you are a soldier awaiting deployment for the D-Day invasion or a GI living in a hooch in Vietnam. Write daily for a week about what you might be experiencing, thinking and doing. Talk about what is going on on the home front as well as what is happening where you are at.
4. Compare a war movie such as "We Were Soldiers," "Saving Private Ryan," "The Longest Day," or others to the real thing by interviewing a veteran from the war depicted in the film. If possible, watch the film with the veteran and have him or her point out the similarities and differences between the film and his or her experience. Then write an essay comparing the film with the insights of the veteran.

Indiana Academic Content Standards:

- USH.5.6** Identify and describe the impact of World War II on American culture and economic life.

- USH.7.5** Identify and describe United States foreign policy issues during the 1960s and 1970s.
- USH.7.7** Describe United States' involvement in Vietnam and reactions by Americans to this involvement.
- USH.9.2** Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past.
- USH.9.3** Investigate and interpret multiple causation in historical actions and analyze cause-and-effect relationships.
- USH.9.4** Explain issues and problems of the past by analyzing the interests and viewpoints of those involved.
- USH.9.5** Use technology in the process of conducting historical research and in the presentation of the products of historical research and current events.
- USH.9.6** Formulate and present a position or course of action on an issue by examining the underlying factors contributing to that issue.

Language Arts

- 11.5.1** Write fictional, autobiographical, or biographical narratives that:
- narrate a sequence of events and communicate their significance to the audience.
 - locate scenes and incidents in specific places.
 - describe with specific details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of the characters; in the case of autobiography or fiction, use interior monologue (what the character says silently to self) to show the character's feelings.
 - pace the presentation of actions to accommodate changes in time and mood.
- 11.5.3** Write reflective compositions that:
- explore the significance of personal experiences, events, conditions, or concerns by using rhetorical strategies, including narration, description, exposition, and persuasion.
 - draw comparisons between specific incidents and broader themes that illustrate the writer's important beliefs or generalizations about life.
- 1.7.11** Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image-makers