

## **Teachers' Guide**

### **Module 1**

#### **ESCALATING INVOLVEMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR**

U.S. involvement in Vietnam began long before March of 1963 when John F. Kennedy sent the first combat troops into Vietnam. Many historians tie their discussions of the U.S. relationship with Vietnam to the French withdrawal from Vietnam and the subsequent division of the country. In this module, students trace the history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

The Korean War (1950-1953), like Vietnam, was a by-product of the Cold War. Korea ended one year before the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and was fought with Communist Soviet Union and China aiding North Korea and America assisting South Korea. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower treated Vietnam like another case of communist aggression directed by Moscow.

Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon and their advisors faced many decisions regarding the degree and type of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The lessons in this module help students identify the issues key decision makers faced about American responsibility to Vietnam. In addition, decision makers used numerous analogies, including comparing U.S. involvement in Vietnam to containment of communism in Europe after World War II and comparing the war in Vietnam to conventional wars. Use these analogies to help students discover how the assumptions made by prominent decision makers affected U.S. policy in Vietnam.

During the aftermath of withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and the Paris Peace Accords, Congress seized the opportunity to enact the War Powers Act on November 7, 1973. This piece of legislation was created in response to the attitude shift that had taken place in Congress since the 1964 passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which initiated full-scale conflict in Vietnam. In this module, students explore the effect of the War Powers Act on the president's authority to carry out military actions throughout the world.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify the key decision makers and the decisions they faced about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War;
- probe analogies that were made comparing the Vietnam War to other wars in American history;
- trace the escalating U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War;
- discuss 1968 as the turning point of the war;
- explore the ramifications of balancing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964) with the War Powers Act (1973);
- analyze the change in roles between the executive and legislative branches over war powers from 1964 to 1973; and
- evaluate the roles of the U.S. presidents who dealt with Vietnam.

## MATERIALS

The *Echoes From The Wall* Teachers' Guide should be used in conjunction with a history textbook. You also will need:

- Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 1964 (module 1, appendix A)
- War Powers Act, 1973 (module 1, appendix B)

## ACTIVITY: JIGSAW TEACHING METHOD

Identifying the key decision makers and the decisions they faced about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Use the jigsaw teaching method to teach the material on presidential involvement in the Vietnam War.

Instructions for the jigsaw teaching method

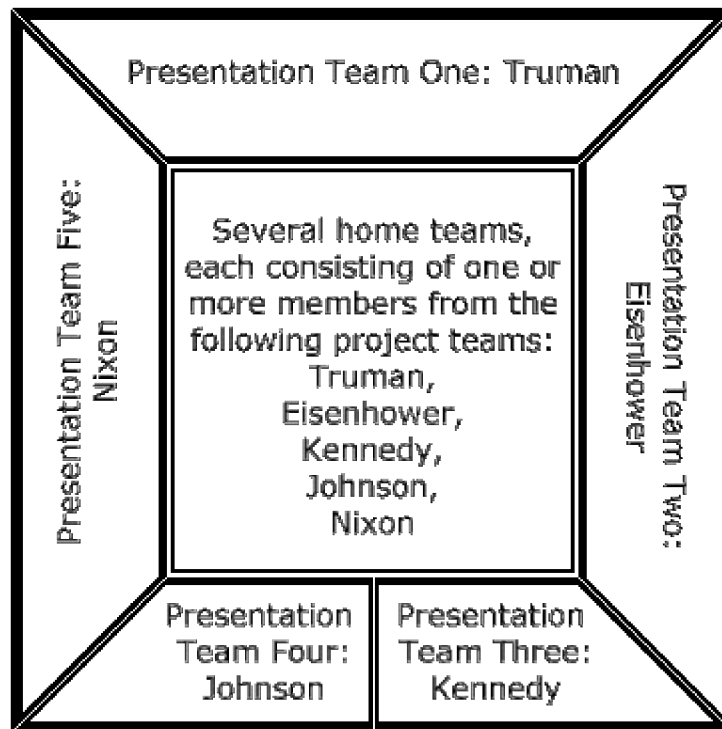
- Students will belong to two teams for this jigsaw exercise — a presentation team and a home team.
- The home teams should consist of at least one representative from each of the assigned presentation teams.
- Each presentation team will read the material assigned to it and prepare to teach the material to their respective home teams.

Team members should agree on the key points that others need to know and how they will present the information.

For the jigsaw presentation on the roles of the U.S. presidents during the Vietnam War, divide students into five presentation teams.

- Team 1, responsible for teaching their home team about President Harry S. Truman's policy and response to Vietnam.
- Team 2, responsible for teaching their home team about President Dwight D. Eisenhower's policy and response to Vietnam.
- Team 3, responsible for teaching their home team about President John F. Kennedy's policy and response to Vietnam.
- Team 4, responsible for teaching their home team about President Lyndon B. Johnson's policy and response to Vietnam.
- Team 5, responsible for teaching their home team about President Richard M. Nixon's policy and response to Vietnam.

Presentation team members should work together to research and prepare their presentations. This process assures uniform quality presentations to the home teams.



After the presentation teams have completed their preparations, they should rejoin their home teams and present the material to their home teams.

Identifying the key decision makers and the issues they faced about American Involvement in the Vietnam War

Complete the worksheet for your team's president. Use multiple resources to complete the following questions. Examine the roles of the presidents by using this worksheet as a guide for preparing an informative and creative presentation to members of your home team.

1. Name of president : \_\_\_\_\_
2. Dates the president was in office : \_\_\_\_\_
3. Political party : \_\_\_\_\_
4. Political party in control of Congress: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Write a summary of this president's policy on Vietnam.
6. What steps did this president take toward the conflict in Vietnam?
7. Did this president's decisions show a change in policy over time? If so, give examples.
8. Did this president increase or decrease the role of the United States in Vietnam when compared with the previous president? If so, how?
9. How did this president keep the public informed of his decisions regarding Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia?
10. What is your evaluation of this president's policy on Vietnam Activity: probing analogies about the Vietnam War

In their book, Thinking in Time, historians Richard Neustadt and Ernest R. May suggest that a common pitfall facing decision makers is failure to probe their implicit analogies about why some current event is like something that happened in the past.

Policy makers made many implicit analogies during the Vietnam War era. Two of the most prevalent were:

1. Applying the "domino theory" to the Vietnam War is like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe and Korea where the spread of Soviet communism was thwarted.
2. Fighting the war in Vietnam is like fighting other conventional wars.

Neustadt and May offer a disciplined way to probe these analogies. You may wish to work with these or similar analogies with your students. Divide the class into two teams. Have one team probe the first analogy and the second team probe the second analogy. You may have to work with each team to get them started and to help them fill in some of the major beliefs that were prevalent at the time of the Vietnam War.

Student instructions for probing the analogy, "Applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War is like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe."

#### *Step One*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers knew about the Vietnam War at the time this analogy was made. Possible answers include:

- Communist guerrillas were trying to overthrow the government of South Vietnam, and
- North Vietnam had become a Communist country.

#### *Step Two*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers did not know about the Vietnam War at the time this analogy was made. Possible answers include:

- the length and depth of U.S. involvement;
- what the response of the North Vietnamese would be to American intervention;
- what the response and/or support to the war from U.S. citizens would be;
- President Kennedy would be assassinated;
- what the level of difficulty would be in containing civil war where the two sides were difficult to distinguish from one another;
- the extent of commitment of the South Vietnamese to the war effort; and
- the stability and continuity of South Vietnamese leadership.

#### *Step Three*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers assumed when they used this analogy about the Vietnam War. Possible answers include:

- the war was supported by world communism;
- the spread of communism in Southeast Asia could be contained by winning the Vietnam War;
- the United States could win the Vietnam War as it had the Korean War (1950-1953);
- Americans would support U.S. involvement in the war for an unlimited period of time;
- America's allies would support ongoing U.S. involvement in Vietnam; and
- Congress would continue to support the president's power to wage war.

*Step Four*

Direct students to make two columns and create (1) a list of ways that applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War was like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe, and (2) a list of ways that applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War was not like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe. Following is a possible diagram:

Applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War was like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe.	Applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War was not like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe.
<p>Both were efforts to contain the spread of communism.</p> <p>There was continued popular support for U.S. involvement in the Cold War in Europe.</p> <p>The president of the United States had unlimited powers to wage war during the Cold War in Europe.</p>	<p>The Vietnam War was a civil war; many of the invasions in Europe were between Communist and non-Communist countries.</p> <p>U.S. presidents did not know whether they would have continued popular support for our involvement in Vietnam.</p>

*Step Five*

Based upon their probing of the analogy, "Applying the domino theory to the Vietnam War is like the successful use of the Cold War containment policy in Europe," and their hindsight as students of history, what advice would your students have given to President Kennedy and his cabinet about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War?

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROBING THE ANALOGY, "FIGHTING THE WAR IN VIETNAM IS LIKE FIGHTING OTHER CONVENTIONAL WARS"

*Step One*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers knew about the Vietnam War at the time this analogy was made. Possible answers include:

- this was a war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam;
- the war front included jungles, rice paddies, cities, and villages; and
- there was no easy distinguishing factor between guerrillas and noncombatant South Vietnamese.

*Step Two*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers did not know about the Vietnam War at the time this analogy was made. Possible answers include:

- the level of difficulty and tactics involved in winning a guerrilla war;
- how long it would take to win this war;
- what the response of the North Vietnamese would be to U.S. intervention;
- what the response to and/or support of the war from U.S. citizens would be;
- the extent of commitment of the South Vietnamese to the war effort;
- the stability and continuity of South Vietnamese leadership; and
- the effect of the media in this war.

*Step Three*

Direct students to create a list of things policy makers assumed when they used this analogy about the Vietnam War. Possible answers include:

- we could train U.S. armed forces to fight a guerrilla war in South Vietnam;
- the United States could win the war;
- U.S. citizens would support American involvement in the war for an unlimited period of time;
- America's allies would support ongoing U.S. involvement in Vietnam; and
- Congress would continue to support the president's power to wage war.

*Step Four*

Direct students to make two columns and create (1) a list of ways that fighting the war in Vietnam was like fighting other conventional wars, and (2) a list the ways that fighting the war in Vietnam was not like fighting other conventional wars. Following is a possible diagram.

Fighting the war in Vietnam was like fighting other conventional wars.	Fighting the war in Vietnam was not like fighting other conventional wars.
Males could be drafted as well as recruited.	The battlefield included rice paddies and jungles.
An opposing army could be defeated in battles using artillery, soldiers, and aircraft.	The enemy was often indistinguishable from the civilian population.
America's military leaders, who were victorious in other wars, would be victorious in Vietnam.	When the village became a battlefield, civilian casualties were high.
	It was difficult to use conventional techniques to fight an enemy that hid in underground bunkers and blended in with the civilian population.

### *Step Five*

Based upon their probing of the analogy, "Fighting the war in Vietnam was like fighting other conventional wars," and their hindsight as students of history, what advice would your students have given to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson about U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

### **TEAM LEARNING**

Note: a team will be responsible for presenting and teaching the material in this module to the class.

#### Team activity: escalating involvement in the Vietnam War

Assign a team to present an overview of the Vietnam War to their classmates. They may do this in any of the following ways:

- A stand-up report to the class;
- A retrospective documentary that they produce about the Vietnam War years; or
- A series of still images with accompanying commentary.
- Students should be given the following resources to complete this assignment:
- The condensed version of Vietnam: A History (module 6, appendix A), by Stanley Karnow.
- Chapter 33 from the textbook, *The Americans: A History*, by Winthrop D. Jordan, Miriam Greenblatt, and John S. Bowes.
- Chapter 30 from the textbook, *The Americans*, by Gerald A. Danzer, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Louis E. Wilson, and Nancy Woloch.
- The material on probing analogies about the Vietnam War found earlier in this module.

Team instructions: escalating involvement in the Vietnam War

Direct students to present an overview of American involvement in the Vietnam War for their classmates. Their presentation can be a stand-up report, a mock news documentary, a series of display panels, or an interactive digital presentation.

Encourage students to try to help their classmates understand the following points:

- How did American involvement in Vietnam escalate?
- Who were the key players in this drama?
  - Which American presidents were involved in the Vietnam War?
  - What did each president do?
  - Who were the key leaders in South Vietnam?
  - Who were the key leaders in North Vietnam?
  - Who were the key American military leaders in the Vietnam War?
  - Who were the key American diplomats during the Vietnam War?
- How did the War Powers Act change the power of the U.S. president to wage war?
- What analogies were used by decision makers as they decided how to involve the United States in the war?

During their presentation, students should help their classmates identify the following players and concepts:

Ho Chi Minh  
Containment  
Truman Doctrine  
Cold War

Ngo Dinh Diem  
Communism  
Domino Theory  
Marshall Plan