Vietnam Unit Lesson #1

French Indochina: Prehistory of the Vietnam War

Focus Statement:
This lesson first introduces students to the aspirations Ho Chi Minh claimed in 1945 when he spoke at Ba Dinh Square and declared independence for the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. Students will read Ho’s speech and compare its wording and central themes to ideas in the American Declaration of Independence. Second, the lesson explores the decision to engage in the battle of Dienbienphu in 1954. Students will react to content in a lecture and apply their content knowledge to a Vietnam colonization map.

Students will use two Habits of Mind as they think about the historical content embedded in this lesson. Students will “perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness,” as they read the primary source document (Ho Chi Minh’ 1945 speech, Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam). Students will also examine the document and consider Ho Chi Minh’s motivations for creating it through the Habit of Mind “people who made a difference.”

In this lesson, a lecture will serve to provide students with content related to French colonialism in Indochina from the late 19th century to 1954 and the leadership of Ho Chi Minh in the mid 20th century. Students will apply the content knowledge they have to Ho’s decision to attack French General Henri Navarre’s troops in the Nam Yum River valley at Dienbienphu (1954).

Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions serves as an organizing theme for this lesson. Students will be asked to consider these questions: What beliefs guided Ho Chi Minh and the French in the mid-20th century? What values and beliefs guided the United States when it became more involved after the battle at Dienbienphu?

Vital Theme & Narrative:
Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas, and Institutions

History Habits of Mind:
Perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness.

Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference.

Objectives:
Students will be able to compare and contrast “Independence” values and beliefs in documents from the Vietnam and American Revolutionary Wars.

Students will be able to identify colonization patterns in Vietnam.
Students will be able to identify early events that led to the Battle of Dienbienphu.

Students will be able to summarize reasons why Ho Chi Minh chose to create the Laodong (Communist) Party in Vietnam.

National History Standards:
US History Era 9 Standard 2B Analyze American policies toward independence movements in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. [Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances]

Historical Thinking Standard 2B Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage by identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.

Historical Thinking Standard 2G Draw upon data in historical maps in order to obtain or clarify information on the geographic setting in which the historical event occurred, its relative and absolute location, the distances and directions involved, the natural and man-made features of the place, and critical relationships in the spatial distributions of those features and the historical event occurring there.

Historical Thinking Standard 3C Analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation including (a) the importance of the individual in history; (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.

Procedures:

A. Begin the lesson by asking students what words or phrases come to mind when they hear the words “Vietnam War.” Ask students to clarify the reason(s) these things come to mind. This will serve as a pre-thinking/ brainstorming activity for the unit.

B. Teacher will then pose the question: How are distinctions made between a war and a revolution?

C. Colonization of Vietnam; 1859 – 1907: Show students the Vietnam colonization map and ask students the following questions: What does this map illustrate? What patterns do you see? Do you recognize any of the names of cities, rivers, etc.

D. Teacher will then give a brief lecture on the history of French involvement in Vietnam as well as list its resources and reasons the French wanted to occupy this country.

E. Lecture on Ho Chi Minh’s emergence as leader of the Vietminh. Emphasize portions of Ho’s life when he lived in France and the United States. Lecture will include his association with General Vo Nguyen Giap, Ho’s military commander.

F. Distribute copies of the edited document, Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. As the class reads the document, ask the following questions: Does this document remind you of any other documents (from U.S. History)? Why do you think Ho Chi Minh modeled this document
after the U. S. Declaration of Independence? Why did Ho give this speech at this time (1945)? To what extent does the situation in Vietnam resemble the political climate in the U. S. before the Revolutionary War?

G. Closure: Comparison of Declaration documents (see assessment).

Methods of Assessment:

A. Teacher will hand out the “Independence documents” Venn diagram exercise. Students will compare their Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to a copy of the Declaration of Independence (United States).

Materials:


DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE
OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM
Ho Chi Minh's Speech, Ba Dinh Square, September 2, 1945

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free . . .

These are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice . . .

They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center, and the South of Viet-Nam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united . . .

They have fettered public opinion; they have practiced obscurantism against our people.

In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of bank notes and the export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists violated Indochina’s territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them . . .

On several occasions before March 9, the Viet Minh League urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the Viet Minh members, that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang . . .

From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.
After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.

... Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for dozens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France . . .

The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country . . .

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country . . .”

[Source: Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977).]
United States Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

“That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes . . . But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good . . .

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining, in the mean time, exposed to all the dangers of invasions from without and convulsions within . . .

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers . . .

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:
For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury . . .

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation . . .

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people . . .

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do . . .”

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[ The recommended picture to use in this space can be found at http://www.atlas-historique.net/1815-1914/cartes/IndochineConquete.html ]
I. French Colonization – 19th Century:
   a. French came in two stages: French Jesuit priest comes in 1627 to Hanoi to convert Vietnamese to Catholicism. (Father Alexandre de Rhodes.) Next, in a series of naval attacks starting in 1847. Tried to capture city of Tourane (later named Danang). Attacked again in 1856 & 1858 (when the French captured the city.
   b. French moved on Saigon and eventually captured it in 1861 after successful Vietnamese guerilla attacks.
   c. 1887 – French establish the French Union after extending its control over both Central (Annam) and Northern (Tonkin) Vietnam. Installed a French government.

II. French Colonization – 20th Century Vietnamese Resistance:
   a. 1919 – Ho Chi Minh speaks at Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I. Presents an Eight Point Plan calling for Vietnamese representation in French parliament along with freedom of speech, press, association, release of all political prisoners, and full equality under the law.
   b. 1925 – Ho Chi Minh begins to resist French imperialism. Founds the Marxist group the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam.
   c. Sept. 12, 1930 – The Nghe An Revolt occurs. Peasants (6,000) march on Vinh (the provincial capital). French airstrike kills 174 people. A second airstrike is called in against Vietnamese relatives coming to claim the bodies of the initial dead. This leads the French to pursue Vietnamese nationalists, including Ho Chi Minh. He is tried in absentia after being exiled, found guilty of treason, and sentenced to death.
   d. 1940 (July) – Japanese forces take Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China. Displaces the French in most of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh seeks aid from the American OSS. The OSS ships 5,000 guns to the Vietminh to fight “. . . only against the Japanese.”
   e. 1941 (May) – Ho Chi Minh founds the Viet Nam doc Lap Dong Minh, or Vietminh, (the League for Vietnamese Independence).
   f. 1945 (August) – Emperor Bao Dai supporters rally in Hanoi. 150,000 people show up waving Vietminh flags. People’s Rallies continue for two days in Vinh, Hue, Saigon, Haiphong, Danang, and Nha Trang.
   g. 1945 (August) – Emperor Bao Dai abdicates the throne. Ho Chi Minh leads the Vietminh in a march a week later. Gives a speech announcing the creation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. U.S. military officials invited as guests. Vietminh band plays “The Star – Spangled Banner.” (Read account of this in transcript of Dan Roger’s Cantigny interview: [http://mediasite.bsu.edu/BSU40/Viewer/?peid=ac6d0ef8-3914-4b5a-8f25-486f8adea12b).]
Comparing documents: The Vietnam War

Name: ____________________________________

 Directions: Complete the diagram below by comparing the United States’ Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. Write words or ideas mentioned only in the U.S. Declaration of Independence inside the left section. Write words or ideas mentioned only in the Declaration of Independence of Viet-Nam inside the right section. Use the center area for words or phrases that you find in both documents. Use your copy of both documents to complete the diagram.