Vietnam Unit Lesson #10

Lasting Influences of Vietnam

Focus Statement

This lesson investigates the legacy of the Vietnam War by examining individual soldiers’ experiences as well as examples of music and art as expressed in the popular culture. The sources provided in this lesson should help students personalize the experience, develop historical empathy, and build fundamental skills as a historian. Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions is the vital theme that organizes the content of this lesson.

Students are asked to look at an interview excerpt from the Ball State Cantigny Project with Sergeant David Hack before the lesson and address questions that deal with interview skills and the content dealing with David Hack’s experiences as a Vietnam Veteran. As an opening activity students listen to Bruce Springsteen’s Born in the U.S.A. Students are to analyze lyrics from the song and create an interpretation of the song as a way to empathize with what soldiers dealt with after coming home. During the class period the teacher introduces the assessment where students will conduct an interview and form an argumentative essay on how Vietnam Veterans were treated as they returned to their homeland. Finally as an end of class activity the teacher briefly describes the Veteran War Memorial in Washington, D.C and presents quotations and pictures that evoke emotions felt by veterans and citizens when viewing the memorial.

Vital Theme  Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas, and Institutions

Habit 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.

Objectives

1. Examine the effects of the Vietnam War on individual soldiers and American culture.
3. Compose and create a personal oral history.
4. Synthesize these ideas by writing a paper arguing a viewpoint on the treatment of Vietnam Veterans.
5. Analyze the Vietnam Memorial and its influence on individuals.

National History Standard  Era 9 Standard 2C Analyze the constitutional issues involved in the war and explore the legacy of the Vietnam war [formulate a position or course of action on an issue].

Historical Thinking Standard 4B Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.
Historical Thinking Standard 4C Interrogate historical data.

Procedures

Pre reading Homework

In preparation for this lesson students should read the transcript of the interview with David Hack by Ball State Student Steve Brown. They can also listen to it from the link provided in the materials section if they have computer access. The questions provided here are to promote students’ willingness to think about how to conduct a historical oral interview as well as to comprehend/summarize what they have read.

- What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD?) What are its symptoms? Do all soldiers suffer from it? Why?/Why not? What evidence suggests Mr. Hack suffers from it?
- What things frighten Mr. Hack? Why do you think this is so?
- What kinds of questions did the interviewer ask? What were the main topics being discussed? What similar/different questions would you ask?
- Were the questions asked in any particular order that you noticed (e.g., easy to hard, general to more personal, work followed by family life, etc.)?
- Why does Mr. Hack feel Veterans “Got the short end of the stick”?
- What surprised/did not surprise you about Mr. Hack’s answers to questions?

Opening

Have students listen to Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.” Have students write their first emotions when they hear the song. Read these out loud anonymously. Then ask students questions to help them contextualize the creation of the song:

- Who is Bruce Springsteen?
- When was this song written?
- How does the writer of the song tell a story? What topics are being discussed?
- Why do you think the writer might have selected these topics?

Play the song again and stop and focus on the following lyrics:

*You end up like a dog that's been beat too much*
'Til you spend half your life just covering up

- What does a dog that has been abused act like? What similarities does this have with PTSD and the transcripts of the Mr. Hack interview?
Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says "Son if it was up to me"
I go down to see the V.A. man
He said "Son don't you understand"

- Do you think that Veterans may have struggled with their jobs when they returned from the war? Why or Why not?

I had a buddy at Khe Sahn
Fighting off the Viet Cong
They're still there, he's all gone
He had a little girl in Saigon
I got a picture of him in her arms

- How does/would it affect you if your friend died in combat? Would you change as a person?

Nowhere to run, ain't got nowhere to go

- What does this individual feel like? Why?

In Class Activity

The teacher should explain to students to think about the kind of questions that were asked in the Cantigny interviews they have read throughout this unit. List student examples on the board, developing such categories as are appropriate (for example, questions that should be personalized to the individual, be open-ended, and have follow ups).

Explain that students will be conducting an oral history interview and that they should record the interview, preferably in audio form so they can listen to it again when writing their summary.

Writing Interview Questions

Prompt: Think of a Veteran of any war that you could interview. This can be a relative, friend, neighbor or anyone else you may know who has fought in a U.S. war. Create questions that you could ask this person. The focus of your interview should be on their treatment once they came back to the United States. Questions should be personalized to the individual, be open-ended, and have follow ups. Make sure you have enough content to complete a two page writing assignment.

Closing

Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial
Ask the class if anyone has been to the Memorial in Washington D.C? What was their impression of it?

Explain to the class that the Memorial actually includes three separate memorials. The first is a controversial minimalist piece. It includes 58,256 names of American soldiers either KIA or MIA. The names are ordered chronologically from July 8th, 1959 to the last official U.S. deaths on May 15, 1975. The Three Soldiers is a more conventional memorial that represents a White, Hispanic, and African American soldier patrolling over the wall. Finally, the women’s memorial represents military uniformed nurses attending a wounded soldier. The nurse’s names are Hope, Faith, and Charity.

“I though about what death is, what a loss is. A sharp pain that lessens with time, but can never quite heal over. A scar. The idea occurred to me there on the site. Take a knife and cut open the earth, and with time the grass would heal it. As if you cut open the rock and polished it.” Maya Lin – Architect of the Memorial
"... this memorial is for those who have died, and for us to remember."

Maya Lin – Architect of the Memorial
Pass to leave

On a piece of paper with their name on it, students should write down two thoughts that come to mind when looking at these photographs. If you were chosen to design a memorial for the Vietnam War what would it look like? Who/What would it include?

Assessment

Use the aforementioned prompt regarding the oral history interview and add the following assessment:

Write a two page, double spaced, summary of what you learned in your interview with a Veteran. Create a thesis, idea, or argument pertaining to the treatment of this Veteran after the war. For instance “Veterans are (or are not) mistreated because… and (My interview and sources supports this by saying…)”. Reference one to two additional sources to support your argument.

Sources, Materials, and Accommodations

- David Hack interview along with reading questions.
- Vietnam Memorial pictures
- Audio Device/Player and Bruce Springsteen’s Born in the U.S.A
Brown: When you were back—you’re on your duty, you’re recruiting, were there any difficulties that you experienced? Nightmares, night sweats—

Hack: Sweats constantly. I would wake up in the middle of the night and my chest; the chest cavity would be full of water. And it was extremely embarrassing because the bed that I was laying in was soaking wet.

[1:21:00]

And I’d have to get up and change the sheets and get back in bed and take a beach towel and put the beach towel in the bed and sleep on that because I knew it was going to happen again before the evening would pass. And that was difficult and that to this day still happens. And it’s embarrassing, it really is. When you’re laying in bed and you wake up and you’re soaking wet and that bothers me.

Brown: Why do you think that happens?

Hack: I have no idea.

Brown: Okay. Did that happen before you were in Vietnam?

[1:22:00]

Hack: Oh no. No, I’m sure it was from Vietnam. There was some things that happened in Vietnam—I have TB [tuberculosis] now, and it’s not contagious, but I flunked the blood test, the knot popped up on the arm—that is there. I have glaucoma. Uh, that’s there.

Brown: Do you think you contracted the Tuberculosis in Vietnam?

Hack: Vietnam, right. And I have retinol vein problems. I’m blind in my right eye, I can’t see.

Brown: When did that happen?

Hack: Through the years, yeah. I go to Cleveland Clinic every three months and see a Dr. Shackett there.

Brown: Do you experience hearing loss?

Hack: Hearing loss—I have that problem. I have ringing in my ears, I take a pill for that, actually it’s a vitamin pill for ringing in the ear.
I’ve gone to the best ear doctors in the world and there’s nothing you can do about it.

Brown: I’m assuming you’ve got a disability rating from the VA. [U.S Dept. of Foreign Affairs]

Hack: Not from the VA, from the Army.

Brown: Okay.

Hack: I wouldn’t take the VA.

Brown: Okay.

Hack: Uh, the way it is with the Army and the VA you have to sign off all your rights as being in the Army, receiving an Army pension if you go with VA. I wouldn’t do that.

Brown: So you were entitled because of your service in the Coast Guard and in the Army. How many years did you have in all together?

Hack: Thirteen and a half—fourteen.

Brown: Okay. Um—

Hack: But I’m retired Army.

Brown: Okay.

Hack: I have the retired ID card and I have the retired benefits.

Brown: Okay.

Hack: And I have all my rights. If I went with VA, I’d have to forfeit that.

Brown: Okay.

Hack: And I don’t want to do that. I have the same benefits as a person who spent twenty years, same identical. My wife has her ID card, my children have their ID card—everything.
Brown: And that’s associated [?] because of your wounds?

Hack: Combat concurred wounds, correct.

Brown: Okay, okay. Um, you ever have problems with cars backfiring or—

Hack: Yes.

Brown: Loud noise—

Hack: Yes.

Brown: Can you tell me about that?

Hack: I can’t stand to be around it. I can’t stand to be around a restaurant that has balloons. I won’t—I leave. Uh, I just get up and leave.

Brown: Why the balloons?

Hack: Because they make noise when they pop and then it drives me crazy.

Brown: Have you had any incidents where something went off and hit the deck?

Hack: You bet you.

Brown: How long did that go on?

Hack: It still does. Yeah, I don’t go in restaurants that have balloons.

Brown: For that reason.

Hack: For that reason.

[1:25:00]

I tell my wife, we got to go. Uh, Fourth of July, I do not get involved in it. And there’s a lot of things that I’ve learned to cope with and understand and work around. And that happens to be some of them.

Brown: What else?

Hack: I don’t like to be around belligerent people. I don’t like to be around loud people. I don’t like arguments. I don’t like any confrontation, whatsoever. Uh, don’t’ want any part of it.
Brown: What happens if you get around somebody who belligerent or there’s an argument? What’s your reaction?

Hack: I have to walk away from it.

Brown: If you did not walk away, how would you start to feel?

Hack: I get tensed, yeah. But as a person that has been around a lot of people, I know how to handle my situation.

[1:26:00]

I know that there’s a problem and I have to avoid it and I have to slow down and calm down. I—you know, don’t suffer from PSD—. But I just know that I—that there are issues there that I have to understand.

Brown: When did you begin to learn about that—figure that out?

Hack: Oh, I think while I was on recruiting duty—that I knew that there was problems.

Brown: What did you do about that?

Hack: I worked them out myself. I most certainly didn’t want to sit down with a doctor and say, “Hey, this is what’s going on.” Because I doubt that the doctor would understand, you know. And you most certainly can’t sit down with someone else and say, “Hey, this is what’s going on.” Because they wouldn’t understand either.

[1:27:00]

You have to work it out yourself. And I worked it out myself.

Brown: In talking to a number of Veterans over the last couple of months—

Hack: Mm-hm.

Brown: —it’s been my experience that many times they’re sitting and they get done talking and they say “This is the first time I have ever talked at any length about my military experience and my Vietnam experience.”

Hack: Mm-hm.

Brown: Is that the case with you?
Hack: At three o’clock this morning, I woke my wife up and I told her, I says, “You know, I don’t know you know, how I feel about tomorrow.” And she said “Well, it’s your decision.” So, does that answer your question?

[1:28:00]

Brown: If that was that intimidating for you I’ve got to think that this is a unique event for you.

Hack: Well, it most certainly is. So, that’s how I felt. By the way, I did not go back to sleep.

Brown: Is there something that I haven’t touched on—something you’d like to talk about, something you’d like to share that we need to be sure we talk about?

Hack: I think that—in all honesty, that Vietnam Veterans got the short end of the stick.

Brown: Why do you think that?

Hack: I was in Florida and when I was down there—I was there seven years—

[1:29:00]

Brown: When was this?

Hack: This was uh, twenty years ago.

Brown: So about 1988?

Hack: Yeah, twenty years ago. It was when I came back to the United States, when I came back to Ohio, but prior to that I was there seven years. And I was in Fort Mars, and a bunch of guys came up to me and they says—they knew I was a Vietnam Vet and they says “We’re having a rally for Desert Storm and Vietnam Veterans. We’d like for you to participate.” And I says, “Wow. You’re a day late and a dollar short.” I, on my website sell t-shirts at my cost that says, “Welcome Home.”

[1:20:00]

And I give out bumper stickers free that say, “Welcome Home.” And I sell caps on my website that says “Welcome Home.”—cost, sometimes below cost. And I think that Vietnam Veterans deserve everything underneath the sun for what they’ve done in Vietnam as far as contributing and being a soldier and serving their country. They’re no
better, no worse than anyone else, but I think that they never received the recognition that they should’ve received—not one time. And you look around now and you see these guys, and I’m not you know, saying, “Wow, why not me?”

[1:21:00]

But you look around and you see this today and it’s not the soldier, it’s the civilians and as far as the animosity that we received, that we received a lot. There was a bonus that was given out by people that were Vietnam Veterans by the state of Kentucky. I wouldn’t accept it.

Brown: Why not?

Hack: Because I felt that they were a day late and a dollar short. You know, that’s how I felt. And I still feel that way, you know.

Brown: How did you experience the animosity that you’re speaking about?

Hack: I think that people, some people—not all people, but some people look down on Vietnam Veterans—that they were less of a person.

[1:22:00]

And that’s something that they were sadly mistaken.

Brown: Does that go back to the stereotype that you were describing earlier?

Hack: Yes. Yeah, I get those.

Brown: Everybody’s a Rambo kind of person?

Hack: Right. And I think that’s wrong. You know, it’s totally wrong because everyone wanted to do what they had to do and everyone wanted to survive and everyone was the same. And there’s another thing about it, when I said there’s no atheists in foxholes, you know, that I believe that everyone is created equal—everyone. And when you have a distinction, there’s a problem there.

[1:23:00]

Brown: And you feel some people are making that distinction for—

Hack: I felt they did. You know, in my particular lifestyle now they don’t, you know. Very few people, you know, even question it. I think that I’ve been a leader in my community, a leader in my church, a leader in the
Masonic Lodge, and I’ve tried to lead an example in my business of this is what normal people are and this is how it is and we’re no better or no worse, but don’t come up to me later and say you know, “This is what we’d like to do for you.” I don’t want to hear it, you know, I really don’t. I think that’s called pride.

[1:24:00]

Brown: Well, Sergeant Hack on behalf of Ball State University and Cantigny First Division Oral History Project and myself and my family I’d like to thank you for you service.

Hack: Thank you.

[1:24:24]

End of interview

Picture resources:


