Vietnam Unit
Lesson #4

Geography of Vietnam

Focus Statement:
This lesson focuses on the geography of Vietnam during the time of the Vietnam War. The majority of students have never been to Vietnam and the make up of the land is greatly different from the United States. Therefore, the lesson will focus on many of the differences. Students will view images of the land to create a frame of reference. Understanding of the topography, climate, and agriculture will be taken from the lesson. In addition, the size of the country, its population, and an exploration of agricultural production will be discussed.

The lesson, while not concentrating specifically on the conflict of the Vietnam War, sets the scene for where the conflict was fought. It provides a better overall understanding of the landforms and climate in which US soldiers and the Vietnamese had to fight. Because part of the lesson teaches about the agricultural products produced, it will provide the background understanding of the reasons for the devastation felt by civilians to have the war fought in their own backyard. Not only will the lesson give students necessary understanding of the place the war was fought, it teaches students that not all places look the same. Different climates and land formations require different types of agriculture. Knowledge provided in the lesson keeps students from thinking in terms of the familiar. It helps them understand people experience life differently from themselves.

Vital Theme and Narrative: Conflict and Cooperation

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.

Understand the relationship between geography and history as a matrix of time and place, and as context for events.

Central Question: How does the geography of Vietnam affect agricultural and industrial life?

Objectives: Students will be able to:
   a. Identify Vietnam on a world map
   b. Compare the size of Vietnam and states in America
   c. Compare the different regions of Vietnam
   d. Examine the effect of the climate upon Vietnam
   e. Deduce the need for an irrigation system
   f. Examine the regions of agricultural and industrial production

National Standard: WG.2.1 Name and locate the world’s continents, major bodies of water, major mountain ranges, major river systems.
Geography:
  i. Places and Regions: The physical and human characteristics of places
  ii. Environment and Society: How physical systems affect human systems

Procedures:
  Vietnam compared to U.S.
  Show map of the World
  Ask students questions about the map in order to emphasize two major themes
  Distance between the United States and Vietnam
  Size of country compared to various states in the United States

Population of Vietnam
  In 1970 40 million Vietnamese lived in Vietnam
  22 million in the north and 18 million in the south
  Explain the significance of the 17th parallel during war (show map identifying 17th parallel)
  Identify for the students if the U.S. was for the Vietnamese on the northern or southern part of the 17th parallel

Topography of regions within Vietnam
  Explain the general make-up of the land within Vietnam
  Vietnam is a country of tropical lowlands, hills, and densely forested highlands.
  Level land covering no more than 20% of the area.
  (utilize the image of the field to ask students to make a generalization about the land depicted in the photograph)
  Compare Vietnam’s land make-up compared to such US states as Indiana, re-emphasize amount of arable land in Vietnam
  Indiana flat very little hills except for the southern regions
  Most ground is tillable

Divisions of the land in Vietnam
  Identify the region of the Red River Delta in the north, central highlands, coastal lowlands, and the Mekong River Delta in the south.
  Red River Delta (use map of regions and ask students to use adjectives to describe the image depicted in the picture of the river)
    Size 5,000 sq. miles
    Region is mostly flat
    Describe the significance of area
    Before 1975 delta accounted for 70% of the agriculture and 80% of the industry
Ask students why this is significant for this region at this time.

Key to fighting the war because region is in the North
Supplied the military with food and supplies

Problems within the Red River Delta
Region is only 3 feet above sea level and is surrounded by steep rises of the forested highlands
The area is subject to frequent flooding

Agriculture in the Delta
Because of the flooding canals and dikes are a necessity (show image of canal)
Ask students what is the importance of a dike and canal
Provide irrigation to land
Protect areas from flooding
Ban Gioc waterfall lays in the region 4th largest waterfall in the world
Show image of the waterfall
Emphasize importance of waterfall for irrigation to nearby land

Central Highlands (use map of regions)
Runs though the central part of Vietnam
Area is approximately 20,000 sq. miles
Make-up of region
Region is mostly narrow and very rugged with steep mountains, extensive forests, and rich soil
Consists of 16% of the country’s arable land and 22% of the forested land
Highest peak is found at the Fan Si Pan (image) which is 10,000 feet high
Coastal lowlands extend from the south of the Red River Delta to the Mekong River Basin (Show map locating area)
  Coastal strip has fertile land and rice is cultivated heavily within the region
  Locate the Giai Truong Son Mountain range
  The mountain range forms much of the western border of Vietnam
Locate the Ho Chi Minh Trail
  Show map of Trail location
  Discuss Importance of Ho Chi Minh trail to the war
Mekong River Delta (Show map locating area)
  Region of approximately 25,000 sq. miles
  Mainly of low level plain
  Majority of countries rice is cultivated in the Mekong delta region
  Explain the significance to the area, include access to the sea and rice cultivation
  One of the worlds largest rice cultivating regions
  Delta is easily accessible for trade and export of rice

Climate
  Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate, with humidity averaging 84% throughout the year
  Contrasting with Indiana summer humidity and changing of seasons
  Explain because of the differences in latitude how the climate tends to vary from place to place.
  Highlight monsoon seasons and were the weather is coming from in the different seasons (summer and winter)
  What is the average Rainfall?
    When does it occur during the summer or winter season
    Amount of rainfall
  What is the average Temperature?
    Both winter and summer seasons
    Where is it the coldest in Vietnam?

Agriculture of Vietnam
Rice is the main crop in Vietnam, making Vietnam one of the world's largest rice cultivators. The rice fields occupy 94% of the arable land in Vietnam (show Image of rice paddy dry and wet rice). Discuss rainfall (monsoon season and dry season) and how it affects the rice cultivation. Ask students what this means to the crops and the need for irrigation systems.

Other crops include corn, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, fruit, and vegetables. Emphasize that only 6% of the arable land is used for these crops, which shows the importance of the harvest of rice for the Vietnamese. Compare Indiana's ability to grow numerous types of crops compared to Vietnam which is mostly dependent on rice.

Method of Assessment:
Creation of a Map:
Students will be given a blank map of Vietnam and should identify the following regions and places: Red River Delta, Central Highlands, Coastal Lowlands, Mekong River Delta, 17th parallel, Giai Truong Son Mountain range, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Saigon, and Hanio. Students will then choose any four of the listed geographical regions and in two to three sentences describe each region. They should also select one of the images utilized in class and describe how the image relates to the geographical region on which they chose to focus.

Materials: Maps of geographical regions, lecture outline with key questions
Sources:
http://www.cycfoundation.org/concepts/GiaiTruongSonMountainRange

Recommended sources for images:


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LP4: Figure 1 in this article features a display of the regions of Vietnam. Usage permission granted by Hugh A. Tilson, PhD, Editor-in-Chief of Environmental Health Perspectives.


Mountainous landscape: http://www.asiapacifictravel.vn/photo_north/sapa/Sapa_Hillside_vietnam_mountain.jpg


Mount Fansipan: http://www.travelblog.org/Asia/blog-428329.html