Vietnam Unit Lesson #7

Influence of Counterculture and Media in Vietnam

Focus Statement: The Vietnam War was the first widely televised war in American history. Men, women, and children would watch actual war footage of what was going on thousands of miles away right on their own television set. This new media usage brought disturbing images and commentary to the homes of many Americans who would have been otherwise oblivious to the conflict. In 1968, Walter Cronkite of CBS News publicly questioned whether the conflict could be won. Media coverage began to shift from an unbiased or more favorable view of the war to a negative view of Vietnam. The media's unprecedented coverage had a drastic impact on the American public. People reacted with a passion against this war, and the seeds of protest were sparked in a previously unseen mass in American and world wartime culture. Controversies in Vietnam corresponded with the counterculture movement in the United States. This lesson focuses on what the counterculture meant to the wartime soldier and its effects on troop morale.

This lesson utilizes Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas, and Institutions as its organizing theme. This VTN works well because the counterculture in particular was a social movement that encapsulated changing values in American society and challenged American ideas regarding liberty and order. This lesson’s habits of mind are two-fold by building historical empathy and seeking to assist students in understanding how things happen and how things change, how human intentions matter, but also how their consequences are shaped by the means of carrying them out, in a tangle of purpose and process. These habits of mind work illuminate the content of the lesson which discusses how the media and counterculture affected the outcome of the Vietnam war and influenced how many Americans thought about this conflict.

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

Habit of Mind: Understand how things happen and how things change, how human intentions matter, but also how their consequences are shaped by the means of carrying them out, in a tangle of purpose and process.

Perceive past events as they were experienced by individuals at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness.

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze quotes from the media and its subsequent effects on the American audience.
2. Students will relate the shift in attitude toward the war in Vietnam and its effects on American soldiers.
3. Students will utilize their knowledge of facts about Vietnam and the influence of media in order to craft an interpretation regarding specific turning points in the war.

4. Students will analyze images regarding the counterculture during this time period.

**National History Standard:** Era9 Standard 2C Evaluate how Vietnamese and Americans experienced the war and how the war continued to affect postwar politics and culture [appreciate historical perspectives].

**Historical Thinking Standard 3A** Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas.

**Historical Thinking Standard 3B** Consider multiple perspectives.

**Procedure:**

I. **Opening**
   a. On an Overhead display the quote by Walter Cronkite and then Lyndon B. Johnson, *(Quote 1 in resources/materials).*
      1. Who are Walter Cronkite and LBJ? Why are they important and how do they give validity to the quotes?
      2. What does LBJ mean when he says “If I have lost Cronkite I have lost middle America.”
      3. What do these ideas tell us about Cronkite’s and more specifically the media’s influence on American culture at this time?

II. **Media Influence**
   a. Have students watch short clip showing the differing media images in Vietnam. *(Website 2 in resources/materials)*
      1. Ask students to consider the following
         1. Imagine you are living in 1972. What would your view of the war be if you saw images similar to these every night on your TV Screen?
         2. How might Americans have been influenced by images such as these?
         3. What do you think television networks were trying to accomplish by showing such graphic images?
   b. Read the Quote by Marshall McLuhan
      1. *(Quote # 2 in resources/materials)*
      2. Who is McLuhan and why does his opinion matter?
      3. What is McLuhan trying to convey in this quote?
      4. How does this quote relate to the quote LBJ said about Walter Cronkite?

III. **Counterculture**
    1. Play “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival
       1. Hand out the lyrics to the students so they can follow along as they listen.
a. When was this song written/sung and by whom?
b. What key ideas are discussed in this song?
c. Why do you think it was written?
d. In what ways could this song have influenced people’s thought?
e. What type of song is it? Is it for or against the war in Vietnam?
f. How might this song related to other movements in the United States?

2. Show first image of 1967
   1. Ask students about the image:
      a. What do you notice about this image?
      b. How are the people dressed and acting?
      c. What is your impression of this photo?
      d. Utilize the transcript on the soldier’s perspective regarding the images (resources/materials).
         i. How do students react to the soldier’s comments?
         ii. What questions might they have for individuals in the image? What questions might they have for the soldier?

3. Show second image 1968
   1. Ask students about the image:
      a. What do you notice about this image?
      b. How are the people dressed and acting?
      c. What is your impression of this photo?
      d. Utilize the transcript on the soldier’s perspective regarding the images (resources/materials).
         i. How do students react to the soldier’s comments?
         ii. What questions might they have for individuals in the image? What questions might they have for the soldier?

4. Show third image 1969
   1. Ask students about the image:
      a. What do you notice about this image?
      b. How are the people dressed and acting?
      c. What is your impression of this photo?
      d. Utilize the transcript on the soldier’s perspective regarding the images (resources/materials).
         i. How do students react to the soldier’s comments?
ii. What questions might they have for individuals in the image? What questions might they have for the soldier?

IV. Closure

On a sheet of paper, have students answer the following questions:
1. How are all of these images similar?
2. How are all of these images different?
3. To what extent did the media influence counter culture? To what extent did the counter culture influence the media?
   Explain your reasoning.

Method of Assessment:

The year is 1969. You are a news journalist and although you realize you are responsible for reporting the news in an objective fashion, you have a specific position regarding US involvement in Vietnam. Write a minimum of 3 paragraphs describing what is happening in Vietnam, what your views are on the war, and why you have arrived at this position. How do you think your feelings about the Vietnam War might influence the way you report various news items? Utilize either one or more of the images from class, “Fortunate Son,” or another source as examples to support your perspective.

Materials/Resources:

Quotes/Song Lyrics:

1. “Who won and who lost in the great Tet offensive against the cities? I’m not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout, but neither did we. The referees of history may make it a draw. It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did then best they could”. 1968- Walter Cronkite

Most evenings Cronkite ended his broadcasts with “And that’s the way it is.” That night he ended with a more somber, “This is Walter Cronkite. Good night.”

“That’s it. If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost middle America”. – Lyndon Johnson responding to Cronkite’s remarks.

2. "Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America--not on the battlefields of Vietnam”. --Marshall McLuhan, 1975

3. CCR Fortunate Son Lyrics
Some folks are born made to wave the flag,
Ooh, they're red, white and blue.
And when the band plays "Hail to the Chief",
Ooh, they point the cannon at you, Lord,

It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no senator's son, son.
It ain't me, it ain't me; I ain't no fortunate one, no,

Yeah!
Some folks are born silver spoon in hand,
Lord, don't they help themselves, oh.
But when the taxman comes to the door,
Lord, the house looks like a rummage sale, yes,

It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no millionaire's son, no.
It ain't me, it ain't me; I ain't no fortunate one, no.

Some folks inherit star spangled eyes,
Ooh, they send you down to war, Lord,
And when you ask them, "How much should we give?"
Ooh, they only answer more! more! more! yoh,

It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no military son, son.
It ain't me, it ain't me; I ain't no fortunate one, one.

It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, no no no,
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate son, no no no.

Websites
2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2xgTsqsBhE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2xgTsqsBhE) - media and Vietnam
1. **What were your views on the counter culture before you began your Tour of Duty in Vietnam? How did they change once you enlisted? Do you still hold those same views today?**

When I first enlisted I was 18 to 20 and my first tour was in 1967, the counterculture was just starting so there was not much protest yet. I came back and was injured and I asked myself why? But then thought that's why we are fighting for their right to protest.

I have no negative thoughts towards them; the problem was once the protesters made their protests personal. My mindset was that we were still fighting for their rights. I did not have a problem with the protesters as long as it was not violent.

2. **When you saw images like these, what feelings and thoughts did you have? How did you view these Americans? Did you consider them good citizens?**

1967 photo- Compared to the other photos you can see the difference in a year. They were wearing suits and ties, the counter culture protested the war and was it only convenience to go along with the beginning of the counter culture.

1968 photo- Misguided, in one word. The first image protesting the war and not the vets did not get across. What does love not war really mean? What I see here is the stereotype of protester, young, misguided and not part of the mainstream society. i.e. a San Francisco protester. For example, was Woodstock a protest or an excuse to party? And I think there was the influence of others on thoughts because of the liberal lean. I think they did not think for themselves.

1969- the Vietnam wall was a huge protest in 82, there was much anti US literature such as the NLF. They were still protesting the war even though it was over. In this photo there was a difference in protest first of it was in a different country as well as a socio-economic class. These people were not the dropouts of society.

3. **When was the first time that you really felt the presence of the counter culture? What was your initial reaction to them?**
I felt the presence the first time when I had my first injury in 68 to January 69. I was stateside for 9 months.

4. **You stated in your interview that you enlisted in November of 1965 and yet did not get to Vietnam until September 1967. had your views on the war changed at this time or did you feel a shift in public attitudes during this two year period?**

There was a large lag because of officer candidacy school. It was six months plus two months of basic plus two more months of infantry training, and I had a few posts for six months. But the entire time I was housed on a base while training. When I had a friend died I didn't feel vengeance but it helped me keep focused on my task and why I had enlisted.

5. **Were there different views among enlisted men and drafted men regarding the counter culture and protest movement? And did that ever lead to tension in your division?**

The tense issue was being enlisted or drafted. Because it was a question of being forced verses volunteering. You could tell by the serial number if you were drafted or enlisted. In the US mess hall they occasionally came down on draftees and this was in 65 and 66.

Once you were there though there was a single focus mostly you received military news and occasional news from the states. There was rotating rest and relaxation where you could go and see your spouses. We were not in a vacuum but the information was not instantaneous.

Many Vets were upset with Jane Fonda and they viewed her as a traitor, particularly POWS. It was the same country protests but it was different because now they were going to the enemy and protesting there.

6. **In your interview there is a lot of talk about a feeling of fraternity, if a man came in with differing views on the war, would they change once he grew to know this company**

You were family but you did not want to get too close to each other because there were too many causalities. When you have close friends it’s harder to insulate yourself against the pain of their loss. But I did take actions that caused loss of life to save another’s life and there was still a wall there as well. We called the new guys FNG’s (fucking new guys) because early in your tour you had more of a chance you would die. And you didn’t even want to know them. It was an emotional hurt so to protect ourselves we didn’t get close. I lost 2/3rds of my platoon, how else could I function. I trained myself
to harden myself because it was not a matter of if or when I had over 26,000 men to worry about so it was always a cautious closeness

7. On your first day in Vietnam you talked about how you had to make room in your helicopter for a camera man and a reporter, what was your view of these two men?
   a. Did they have a bias?
   b. Was this the only encounter with the media that you had during your tours in Vietnam?

I thought that they were a waste of two good spots on a mission and I didn’t want a cameraman I wanted I fighting element. We spent way too much time providing security for the media. It took too much resources to make sure they were safe.

The things that they reported tended to be negative; the positive impacts were not talked about. The news media didn’t portray that. The media shifted the view of Vietnam from positive to negative. There was always a chance while watching this war news that one could potentially see family and they could all look to see what’s happening to the boys.

This changes public opinion; a lot of bad things were done in Vietnam, done by people who had lost touch with reality. But there were lots more of good things but that gets overshadowed.

There is always going to be war, I am not an advocate, but there is a difference shooting someone to survive versus indiscriminately shooting people, i.e. killing and murdering.

Recommended additional image: Vietnam War protest in 1968, a young woman holding a sign stating “LOVE NOT WAR.” Due to copyright concerns, this image could not be included, however, in-classroom use would be protected under Fair Use policy.

Image reference:
