

**Oakland Museum of California**  
*What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era*

**Lesson Plan #1: From the Quiet Decade to Social Revolution:  
How the Vietnam War Transformed California**

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**Subject:** U.S. or World History

This lesson plan can be adapted for any unit focusing on the Vietnam War—whether in middle school, in world history, or U.S. history. It can also be used as a context piece for a literary study, for instance, of novels from the period.

**Topic or Unit of Study:** Vietnam War; U.S. history—1950s and 1960s

**Grade/Level:** 11

**Learning Goals for Students to Accomplish**

What students will know and be able to do:

- Understand social and political pressures in the U.S. caused by the challenges of the Vietnam War.
- Understand the connection between the war and social movements, and the cultural upheaval in the U.S.
- Learn how to conduct oral histories with activists to understand how international events impacted their perspectives.
- Analyze written accounts of the period, comparing multiple perspectives.
- Work in groups to explore and research different social movements of the period.
- Evaluate similar social pressures and outcomes.

**Essential Question:** How did the expanding war in Southeast Asia transform political and social relations in the U.S.?

**Summary**

Students will use reading, video, discussion, and oral histories to understand and evaluate the social pressures brought on by the Vietnam War, and the transformation of society that inaugurated the 1960s. Students will also conduct research on the impact of the Iraq war on U.S. society and responses to that war. In this way, students will be able to make parallels between the social context today and that of the Vietnam War era as well as evaluate the legacy of the Vietnam War. In groups, they will visit current grassroots organizations and activists and report on work being done today.



## IMPLEMENTATION

### Learning Context

Identify your classroom needs and related adaptations—such as local conditions, special education and English Language Learners, and course level of difficulty.

### Time Allotment

This can be a one or two week project, depending on how elaborate your plan.

**Sample Student Products:** Oral history, student journals, research reports

### Author's Comments & Reflections

This lesson assumes students have already conducted an introductory study of the Vietnam War era. The lesson plan is intended as a jumping-off point for planning your own context. Many articles, texts, and video resources are recommended. Of course, you may pick whatever resources work for you, or you might decide to substitute other excellent options that are not listed here. Note also that this lesson plan has a limited range and a modest goal—to help students understand some broad strokes of changes in the U.S., from the Fifties to the Sixties. They will come to this understanding with a number of activities, including an exploration of the impact of and the response to the Iraq war today in the U.S.

**PROCEDURE** (Instructional Activities, Student Activities, Progress Monitoring)

### Anticipatory Set

1. While many social struggles were present, the 1950s are generally characterized as a period of social quiet, domestic life, and economic boom. Through a number of readings, video clips, and discussions, students understand the main elements of the 1950s. A variety of texts about the 1950s can be used, especially those that show social quiescence. Show students TV shows from that period, such as those on the *1950s TV's Greatest Shows* DVD (with “Leave it to Beaver,” “Ozzie and Harriet,” etc.). The repression of political dissent during the McCarthy period also contributed to the sense of social passivity. (See the document **The Legacy of McCarthyism**, by Ellen Schrecker, included in Student Handouts, as an example of resources on this issue.)
2. Students look at dissent and social tensions in this period. There are only a few ways to observe any conflict in the social fabric, with contradictions just below the surface. For example, the early Civil Rights Movement started in the 1950s, as did a nascent movement against the atomic bomb and what would become the United Farm Workers (UFW) Union. Some examples of the social tensions were apparent in popular culture, such as in the films *Imitation of Life*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Defiant Ones*, and *Something of Value*. The documentary *Point of Order* by Emile de Antonio also demonstrates the demise of McCarthyism. Again, excerpts from these films are sufficient to make the point. In general, dissent was expressed as *alienation*, a sense of disengagement but also powerlessness. Another example is the poetry of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg. Assessment: Class discussion.
3. Students study how the Civil Rights Movement broke through the social passivity. For homework, they read the article “Tallahassee Spirit: Tired of Being Pushed Around,” by Samuel Gandy, 1956, *Norfolk (Virginia) Journal*, in *Reporting Civil Rights*, Library of America, p. 280.

Formative assessment: Student journals.



## Modeling

1. To learn about the rise of the New Left, students view the film *Berkeley in the Sixties*, Part I, first 40 minutes. Students take part in discussion groups using **Questions for *Berkeley in the Sixties***, included in Student Handouts.
2. To look at historical evidence, go back as a class and examine a few of the interviews in *Berkeley in the Sixties*. Discuss how evidence is gathered, how history is written. View early war footage from *Vietnam: A Television History* and text from Stanley Karnow's book *Vietnam: A History*.
3. Introduce oral history practice, using sections from ***Collecting Community History Handbook*** (CCH) found on the Oakland Museum of California's WGO lessons page. Also use the website, <http://www.dohistory.org/home.html> created by the Film Study Center, Harvard University, and hosted by the Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, which has several web pages on working with primary sources and, in particular, oral history. To purchase the complete CCH handbook, you can visit the OMCA online store at [http://www.museumcastore.org/curric\\_items.html](http://www.museumcastore.org/curric_items.html)
4. Show students how to sort through evidence. Read the oral histories of **Charles Benninghoff, Lois Lundberg, Clay Carson, Karen Jo Koonan, Tom Smothers, and Frank McAdams** available under Student Handouts.
5. Have a discussion about the reliability of sources and the need for multiple sources.

## Guided Practice

1. Present a mini-lecture about the transformation brought about by the Vietnam War. The following are talking points for the lecture:
  - Social conditions of the 1950s
  - Cold War
  - Conformity
  - Elements of alienation
  - Rise of Civil Rights activism
  - Changes in the world situation (anti-colonial revolutions in Algeria, Indochina, Cuba, etc.)
  - Transition to the 1960s
  - Kennedy election and assassination
  - Deepening involvement in Vietnam
  - Spread of Civil Rights activism, move to the Northern cities
  - Other minority movements, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asian American
  - Draft resistance, pacifism, student activism
  - Women's movement
  - Conservative movement, Young Americans for Freedom, John Birch
  - Society, *National Review*, William F. Buckley, Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan
  - Culture—folk music, rock and roll
2. Have students in groups each look at a different issue, and identify the impact of the war. These issues include: civil rights, G.I. rights, conscientious objection, new conservatism, culture/music, and women's rights. Point out how in the period of the Vietnam War, dissent was expressed as *commitment*, a sense that one could make a change in society and one needed to take a stand, take a position.
3. Look at the current social context. Students develop their own questions and research goals in examining the impact of the Iraq war on U.S. society and various responses of different sectors of society. In this way, students are able to make parallels between the social context today and that of the Vietnam War era as well as evaluate the legacy of the Vietnam War.
4. Students, in groups, plan visits to current grassroots organizations or individual activists and plan reports



on each group's work and the guiding ideology of the organization or the individual. Students should seek to find community and political organizations that reflect a cross-section of perspectives, including liberal and conservative. Questions should seek to discover the impact of the Iraq war and the response of the group's research subject to the war.

5. Have one group conduct this visit and report first in order to demonstrate how to do it and to uncover problems encountered. Students give oral reports to the class, with gathered literature and photographs.

### **Independent Practice**

1. Students research other sources on the period, focusing particularly on social changes in the U.S. between 1955 and 1965.
2. Students research the response to the Iraq war, such as "Mosh" by Eminem. (<http://www.gnn.tv/videos/video.php?id=27>) They can evaluate the Hip Hop generation's response to the war in Iraq.
3. Students, in groups, visit current grassroots organizations and report on the work the group does and its guiding ideology.
4. Students compare what was learned in the fieldwork with the research they have done on the changes in the early 1960s.

### **Closure**

1. Students give reports to class, including oral history evidence, literature, and photographs from the group they visited. Report posters are displayed around the room. Assessment: Group reports and posters.
2. Alienation to commitment. Students write reflection papers on the transformation from alienation to commitment as a general value for how to respond to tensions in society. Assessment: Student writing, formal paper, and a learning log.

### **Follow-Up**

- Students could have an opportunity to visit these organizations or individual activists at a later date.
- Students can consider the trajectory of activism and what outcomes they expect, and actually reach, over time.
- This research can be referenced in the continuing study of the 1960s and beyond.



## **MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**

**Instructional Materials:** Video projection, tape recorders, handouts

### **Resources**

#### **Video**

*Berkeley in the Sixties*

*Vietnam: A Television History*

*1950s TV's Greatest Shows*

*Imitation of Life*

*The Defiant Ones*

*Rebel Without a Cause*

*Something of Value*

*Point of Order*

#### **Books**

Karnow, Stanley, *Vietnam: A History*

Oakland Museum of California, *Collecting Community History Handbook*

#### **Articles**

Schrecker, Ellen, "The Legacy of McCarthyism"

Gandy, Samuel, "Tallahassee Spirit: Tired of Being Pushed Around," 1956, *Norfolk (Virginia) Journal*, in *Reporting Civil Rights*, Library of America, p. 280.

#### **Web resources**

Film Study Center, Harvard University <http://www.dohistory.org/home.html>

Collecting Community History: [http://www.museumca.org/curric\\_items.html](http://www.museumca.org/curric_items.html)

**OMCA What's Going On? Student Handouts Lesson 1** <http://www.museumca.org/wgolessons/#lesson1>

Questions for *Berkeley in the Sixties*

"The Legacy of McCarthyism"

Oral History: Charles Benninghoff

Oral History: Clay Carson

Oral History: Karen Jo Koonan

Oral History: Lois Lundberg

Oral History: Tom Smothers

Oral History: Frank McAdams



## Poetry

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Allen Ginsberg

Bob Kaufman

Ruth Weiss

## Bibliography for Additional Reading

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## CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

### History-Social Science Content Standards:

Students demonstrate the following intellectual, reasoning, reflection, and research skills.

#### Chronological and Spatial Thinking

1. Students compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned.

4. Students relate current events to the physical and human characteristics of places and regions.

#### Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View

2. Students identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations.

3. Students evaluate major debates among historians concerning alternative interpretations of the past, including an analysis of authors' use of evidence and the distinctions between sound generalizations and misleading oversimplifications.

4. Students construct and test hypotheses; collect, evaluate, and employ information from multiple primary and secondary sources; and apply it in oral and written presentations.

#### Historical Interpretation

1. Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

2. Students recognize the complexity of historical causes and effects, including the limitations on determining cause and effect.

3. Students interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

4. Students understand the meaning, implication, and impact of historical events and recognize that events could have taken other directions.

#### 11.9 Students analyze U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

3. Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War and containment policy, including the Vietnam War.

4. List the effects of foreign policy on domestic policies and vice versa (e.g., protests during the war in Vietnam, the "nuclear freeze" movement).

#### 11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

5. Discuss the diffusion of the civil rights movement of African Americans from the churches of the rural South and the urban North, including the resistance to racial desegregation in Little Rock and Birmingham, and how the advances influenced the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of the quests of American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans for civil rights and equal opportunities.



English Content Standards:

1.0 Writing Strategies

Students write coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students' awareness of the audience and purpose and progression through the stages of the writing process.

Research and Technology

1.6 Develop presentations by using clear research questions and creative and critical research strategies (e.g., field studies, oral histories, interviews, experiments, electronic sources).

**ASSESSMENT** (Progress Monitoring)

- Assessment instruments: Student writing (journal and formal paper), group reports, posters, learning logs.
- Formative assessment: Learning logs, class discussion.
- Evaluation of student learning (what they know and are able to do): Final paper, from alienation to commitment.
- Publishing, public display: Class reports, poster exhibition.
- Learning log (student evaluation): Final student evaluation.

