

# WAR, VIETNAM AND AMERICAN LIFE

## A Toolkit for Educators and Parents

### OVERVIEW

**War is the unfolding of miscalculations.  
- Barbara Tuchman**

War has shaped many aspects of American history, from our country's independence from British control through its expansion and emergence as a single nation to its establishment as a world power and protector of democracy and American freedoms. Yet literature and historical writing are full of quotations about the afflictions and regrets of war. This toolkit provides materials to teach about war and its social and political effects from multiple sources, from recordings of veterans describing their experiences to historians' interpretations of causes and effects to archaeology, poetry and newspaper clippings.

The toolkit includes several multimedia resources to help students understand the complexities of war. For example, recordings allow students to hear the voices and words of service members, veterans and families as they describe the personal experiences that made up the wars and aftermaths that we now teach as history.

There's a particular emphasis on the war in Vietnam because of its continuing impact. *The Vietnam War* documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick airing this year highlights the effect of the war on all American lives, particularly those of veterans. The 10-part documentary presents a range of perspectives, including those of American military families, anti-war protestors, politicians, policy makers, and Vietnamese combatants and civilians.

The 10-part *The Vietnam War* series premieres on KERA TV at 7 p.m. on September 17 and continues over the following two weeks. [Click here to find the documentary website](#), which has complete information about the series, including video clips and dates and contents of each episode.

### SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Due to the mature subject matter and, in some cases, graphic content, the toolkit is best suited for high school and college students and mature middle-schoolers. Resources containing materials for younger children are noted.

# TEACHING THE VIETNAM WAR

## PBS

- [Preview of \*The Vietnam War\* documentary](#) from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (25-minute video about making the documentary; includes powerful interviews and archival audio and video)  
Also includes short clips and trailers from the documentary

## PBS Learning Media

- [Teaching the Vietnam War](#) (goes with *The Vietnam War* documentary from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick airing on KERA starting September 17)  
**Includes:** video clips, discussion questions, background essays, PowerPoints, lesson plans and other teaching tools  
**Content:** This extensive, powerful collection is designed to help students explore the social and political dynamics of the Vietnam War. Students will examine why, how, and by whom the Vietnam War was fought, how it affected U.S. citizens at home, and how factors shifted over the course of the war. Students will identify the Vietnam War's legacy and lasting toll on veterans.  
The dozens of resources contribute to four themes addressed in the Burns/Novick documentary:
  - **Politics:** Identifies geopolitical forces that fueled the Vietnam War.
  - **Military:** Examines the military strategy of the Vietnam War and identifies the different countries and cultural groups that fought in the war.
  - **Homefront:** Examine the diverse experiences of Americans on the homefront during the Vietnam War. Military families made sacrifices to support the war effort and the war, particularly the draft, impacted civilian life.
  - **Legacy:** Examine the enduring legacy of the Vietnam War, primarily through veteran narratives
- [Teaching the Vietnam War Through Diverse Perspectives](#) blog post by Lynn Novick
  - An overview of the documentary's goals.
- [As Long as I Remember: American Veterans | Lost Histories: Media Gallery](#) (From Latino Public Broadcasting)  
**Includes:** video clips, lesson plans, teaching guides and student handouts  
**Content:** These resources examine the steep personal toll and enduring legacy of the Vietnam War on three artists from south Texas. These materials will help students consider the forces that shape our understanding of historic events and eras, understand the factors that motivated such a large percentage of Latino servicemen to enlist in the Vietnam War, understand the role of art in recovering from PTSD and explore the personal experiences of Latino Veterans through intimate interviews with the three men.

## WGBH PBS station in Boston

- [The Vietnam Collection](#)  
**Includes:** interviews, archival footage, photographs, original footage and related materials in addition to the full 13 broadcast programs that made up the series.  
**Content:** These materials used in the landmark 1983 series *Vietnam: A Television History*. The 13 parts covered the history of Vietnam from France's colonial control, through the 1945 revolution, to the 1975 U.S. evacuation from Saigon and the years beyond.

## New York Times Learning Network

- [Teaching the Vietnam War With Primary Sources From The New York Times](#)  
**Includes:** teaching activities and photographs, original articles, and first-person accounts accompanied by text explaining their significance.  
**Content:** *The New York Times* chronicled the Vietnam War as it took place and that continues to look back with the benefit of hindsight. From the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, to the Mai Lai massacre, the bombing of North Vietnam and the fall of Saigon, *The Times* was reporting the news as it came to light. In the years since, *The Times* has published myriad articles, opinion pieces and special collections looking back on "the war that changed America."  
**Note:** Non-subscribers can download only five Learning Network lesson plans each month, but can access any NYT materials within the lesson plans free of charge.

# TEACHING ABOUT WAR IN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY

## PBS LearningMedia

- [Soldiers, Veterans, and War in American Life](#)

**Includes:** videos, images, lesson plans

**Content:** These media-rich resources allow teachers to introduce complex discussion topics by bringing stories from the battlefield into American history, world history, and health classrooms. The materials allow students to compare veterans' recounted memories of World War II and Vietnam to understand how these wars shaped American culture. Analyze artifacts and oral histories that reveal important experiences of a nation during times of conflict. Use recent veterans' personal stories to engage in a discussion of how the choice to become a soldier and the experience of serving relate to personal values and goals.

Content is organized in these categories:

- [Experiencing War](#): Perspectives from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Somalia
- [Returning from War](#): Perspectives of veterans, combat photographer, families of veterans, & others
- [Commemorating War](#): Told through memorials, art, poetry, historic archaeology, student views
- [Analyzing War](#): Includes topics like family history, morality of killing during war, historical research on wars
- [Wars](#): Perspectives on the War of 1812, the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan
- [Programs](#): Video clips from recent series *Coming Back With Wes Moore*, *The Draft*, *The Homefront*, *D-Day 360*, *Navy Seals-Their Untold Story*, and *Last Days in Vietnam*

- [Ken Burns: Teaching American History and Culture collection](#)

**Includes:** video clips, images, essays, activities, biographies and lesson plans for teaching many of Ken Burns' best known documentaries, including *The Civil War* and *The War* (about World War II).

## iCivics

- [International Affairs](#)

**Includes:** Lesson plans, game, classroom activity, teaching tips and classroom handouts.

**Content:** iCivics is a nonprofit founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor with digital materials to teach students how government works. Resources in the International Affairs unit examine the evolution of diplomacy and international interdependence by looking at recent and historical global events. The site is free, but teachers need to register to access all of the instructional materials it offers. The accompanying game, *Crisis of Nations*, can be accessed from the International Affairs unit (click on the game icon and then click "Play" or "Assign" on the left side of the page) or from the main navigation bar at the top of each page (click Play and the scroll down to *Crisis of Nations*).

## Scholastic Lesson Plan

- [A Guide to Teaching and Talking About War With Books for Children and Teens](#)

**NOTE:** Some content for all grade levels, including elementary school

**Includes:** Printable teaching guide with suggested books for all grade levels

**Content:** The guide seeks to introduce the topic of war to children and teens in a way that is responsible, honest, and appropriate to their age and level of understanding. The suggested books include fiction, fact, and fantasy were chosen to help teachers and parents guide children and teens as they explore difficult issues related to war, starting with the American Revolution and continuing through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## StoryCorps

- [Military Voices Initiative](#)

**Content:** In these short video clips, service members and veterans reflect on their experiences – friendships, losses, lessons for life. Most are from Iraq but two are cross-generational. The stories are powerful, poignant and rich in detail, making them good starting points for class discussions or prompts for writing assignments.

- [Audio recordings on Vietnam](#)

**Content:** These brief audio clips tell of the lasting effects of the Vietnam War in the words of veterans, family members and friends. Their clear memories and current emotions create vivid pictures of service members and their experiences and legacies.

# RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

All resources have content suitable for children

## American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

- [Terrorism and War: How To Talk to Children](#)

**Content:** Printable advice sheet for parents on how to discuss violence, terrorism, and war in ways that will help children feel secure and understand the world in which they live.

## National Association of School Psychologists

- [Resources: War and Terrorism](#)

**Includes:** Downloadable advice pages for educators and parents.

**Content:** These resources recognize that anxiety can arise from a range of experiences from exposure to news to the uncertainty of having a parent as a first responder. The NASP seeks to help families and educators support children by establishing a sense of safety and security, helping them to process their thoughts and feelings, reinforcing their resilience and strengths, building positive connections within the school community, placing events in the proper context, and providing any needed mental health supports. Includes such topics as “Promoting Compassion & Acceptance in Crisis,” “Supporting Refugee Children & Youth,” and “How Children Cope With Ongoing Threat and Trauma.”

## PBS Parents

- [Talking With Kids](#)

**Content:** The PBS Parents Guide to Talking With Kids combines practical communication strategies with developmental insights, in an interactive format that is easy for parents and caregivers to use. Topics include “Positive Ways to Talk and Listen,” “Negotiating With Kids,” and “I can’t believe I said that,” plus many more. The materials include Age-by-Age Insights for ages 0 – 11.

- [Talking With Kids About News](#)

**Content:** This resource is designed to help parents calm kids' fears, stimulate their minds, and encourage them to think about their place in today's world. It covers such topics as “Discussion Starters” and “Talking and Listening” and offers Age-by-Age Insights for ages 0 – 11.

## Sesame Street

- [Resources for Military Families](#)

**Includes:** Advice chapters for parents and guardians, videos, online activities, apps, games, downloadable PDFs for printing

**Content:** Trust Sesame Street to keep a kids'-eye view when producing materials to help children adjust to disruptions common to military families. Topics include Transition to Civilian Life, Relocation, Routines, Military Homecoming, Injuries, Grief, Deployment and Self- Expression.