



MINNESOTA REMEMBERS
VIETNAM
AMERICA'S SECRET WAR

Activity Guide for Themes of Family and Community

This activity guide was created for use with upper elementary students
but can be modified for secondary levels.

Please review videos before sharing with students, as some of the content is difficult.

Essential Questions

How do history and experiences impact families and communities?

How do place and culture impact families and communities?

Supporting Questions

- What kinds of family structures are there? What roles are in a family?
- How are family structures and roles affected by a war? After a war?
- How does war affect families? How were Hmong families separated/reunited?
- What is a community like in a refugee camp?
- How was life in the refugee camps different from life in Laos? Life in the United States?
- What conflicts did families encounter in Laos and Thailand? What conflicts did families encounter in the United States?
- How did Hmong families connect with their Hmong community in Laos and Thailand? How do they connect with the Hmong community in the United States?
- How have the Hmong people contributed to our communities in Minnesota?

Resources/Materials

- *America's Secret War: Minnesota Remembers Vietnam* (Video) - <https://www.tpt.org/americas-secret-war/>
- Minnesota Remembers Vietnam Story Wall - www.mnvietnam.org
 - **Growing Up in a Thai Refugee Camp**
Children in the refugee camps had to grow up fast. Sia Her shares a few of her formative experiences as a young child in Thai refugee camps.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/growing-up-in-a-thai-refugee-camp/>
 - **A Father's Assassination**
Khou Yang's father, a well-known Hmong soldier, was assassinated by the Communist Pathet Lao in the 1980s. Her mother died at the hands of the Communists when she was a little girl. Decades later, the pain of her parents' deaths still haunts her.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/a-fathers-assassination/>
 - **Death at Ban Vinai Refugee Camp**
Former Special Guerilla Unit Captain Ganghis Khang talks about the poor living conditions at Ban Vinai, the largest of the Thai refugee camps. "Everyone was faced with death and loss," Mr.



- Khang explains, "there was not one day where we didn't carry the dead to be buried."
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/ganghis-khang-death-at-ban-vinai-refugee-camp/>
- **Dr. Mai Na Lee Escapes the Communist Pathet Lao**
As the Secret War ended, Hmong who fought on the side of the United States were hunted by Communist Pathet Lao soldiers in their native Laos. Dr. Mai Na Lee and her family were among the many people who fled the country, eventually swimming across the wide and fast-flowing Mekong River into Thailand's refugee camps.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/dr-mai-na-lee-escapes-the-communist-pathet-lao/>
 - **Dreams Dashed By War**
Samao Xiong wanted to become a teacher, but the Secret War killed that dream. He became a soldier and eventually held a leadership position. In addition to witnessing his friends and soldiers die, he had the heartbreaking responsibility of sending the dead back to their families.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/dreams-dashed-by-war/>
 - **Kang Vang**
Minnesota Remembers Vietnam: The Telling Project, filmmaker Kang Vang reflects on his efforts to capture his father's story about fighting in the CIA's Secret War in Laos.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/kang-vang/>
 - **My Father's Qeej**
When I think about immigration, I think of my own family. We migrated from Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp in Saraburi, Thailand to Saint Paul, Minnesota on September 16, 2004. I can still remember carrying whatever we can on our backs and putting large items in suit cases.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/my-fathers-qeej/>
 - **Bee Vue**
"At that time I was orphaned and devastated. I missed my parents. So, when I saw others playing the flute, I wanted to learn how to play it to express my sorrow."
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/bee-vue/>
 - **What is Hmong Dance**
"Who am I? Who are we? All I remember is...dance. Dance was the only thing that kept me going..."
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/what-is-hmong-dance/>
 - **Cups and Quarts**
Spoken Word artist Kevin Yang performs Cups and Quarts, an original piece about his Hmong heritage, at Twin Cities PBS for the premiere screening of the documentary *America's Secret War*.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/cups-and-quarts/>
 - **Lee Pao Xiong's Battle-scarred Childhood**
Having grown up on the CIA military base Long Tieng, Lee Pao Xiong, Founding Director of the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University - St. Paul, was no stranger to war even as a child. After evacuating Laos, Xiong's family was sent to a Thai refugee camp; in 1976 his father made the decision to move the family to the United States.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/lee-pao-xions-battle-scarred-childhood/>
 - **Hmong Culture in Walnut Grove**
Learn how the Hmong community in Walnut Grove, MN is preserving their rich cultural heritage while adapting to the American way of life. Traditional music, language, and cooking are featured.
<https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/hmong-culture-in-walnut-grove/>



- American Journey [Interview](#) Worksheet (Handout A) and [Research](#) Worksheet (Handout B)

Family and Community Themes

- Family Structures and Roles
- Family Values and Traditions
- Generational Differences in Families
- Building and Connecting with Community
- Differences in Communities and Place

Activities

1. Journal/Quick Write

a. Write about your family.

This is a general topic for students to think and write about before watching the video clips and doing the following activities. *Who is in your family? What makes your family unique and special? What would you want others to know most about your family?*

b. Write about your community.

This is a general topic for students to think and write about before watching the video clips and doing the following activities. *What and who is in your community? What makes your community unique and special? What do you like most about your community? What makes you feel safe/unsafe in your community?*

2. Effects of War on Families

a. Watch Videos (select those most relevant to your students): [Lee Pao Xiong's Battle-scarred Childhood](#), [A Father's Assassination](#), [Dr. Mai Na Lee Escapes the Communist Pathet Lao](#), [Dreams Dashed By War](#)

- **Discussion Questions:** *How were families impacted by the events of war? How were families separated, torn apart, and/or reunited during and after the war?*

b. Families in Refugee Camps

- **Watch Videos (select those most relevant to your students):** [Growing Up in a Thai Refugee Camp](#), [Lee Pao Xiong's Battle-scarred Childhood](#) (watch 1:27-4:40), [Death at Ban Vinai Refugee Camp](#)
- **Discussion Questions:** *How did Hmong families get to refugee camps? What were the communities in the refugee camps like? What were conditions like? What dangers or fears did people who lived in refugee camps have? What pastimes or activities did people have living in refugee camps? How was order kept in the refugee camps? What are some differences and similarities between your community and the communities in the refugee camps?*
- **Compare and Contrast** - Create a T-chart or Venn Diagram. Compare how a Hmong refugee's community is different and/or similar to your own community.

3. My Family's Journey Story

- ##### a. Discuss:
- How did your family come to live in America? Are you "first generation" or did your ancestors settle in America a long time ago? Or is your family indigenous to this place? What is your family's journey story (or stories)?* Note: it is important to acknowledge that some of your students' families may be indigenous to this continent and have always called this place home, while there are many others whose families made journeys to America, long ago or more recently.



- b. Interview and Research**

Interview a family member to learn about their immigration journey, or research about an ancestor's journey to America that resulted in your own family being in the U.S. If your family is indigenous to this continent, is there a journey story you can learn about? Use [Interview Worksheet](#) or [Research Worksheet](#) to gather and organize information.
 - c. Share and Reflect**

Share each other's family journey stories. *What similarities did you find between stories? How do these stories of our families contribute to the diversity in our communities? How do they contribute to our country's identity?*
- 4. Family Traditions**
 - a. Watch the following videos.**
 - [My Father's Qeej](#) - Why was the qeej important to the father? How did the daughter's view of her father's qeej change from leaving the refugee camp to later in life in America?
 - Consider sharing the picture book [Melody of the Qeej](#) (link brings you to a pdf of the book and activity guide).
 - [Bee Vue](#) - Why is the flute important to Bee? What are the stories in Bee's songs on the flute?
 - b. Descriptive Essay** - Write a descriptive essay about a tradition your family has. *When did this tradition start or how long has it been a part of your family? Who is a part of this tradition? What is the importance of this tradition in your family?*
- 5. Generational Differences and Understanding**
 - a. Watch video:** [Kang Vang](#)
 - b. Discussion Questions:** *What are some differences between Kang and his father? What expectations did they have of each other? How do they appreciate each other?*
- 6. Creative Writing**
 - a. Watch the following video clips.** Discuss the video clips with guiding questions.
 - [Cups and Quarts](#) - How does Kevin describe his grandmother? How does Kevin use symbolism in his piece? What are Kevin's thoughts about his grandmother based on what he says about measurements? What is the main message of "Cups and Quarts"?
 - [What is Hmong Dance](#) - What messages of cultural identity does Magnolia share in her poem? Why do you think she chose to write a poem about Hmong dance?
 - b. Write a song, poem, spoken word, or prose** about your family, a family member, a family tradition, an object or heirloom in your family, etc.
 - c. Extension** - Perform, present, or create a video of your song, poem, spoken word, or prose.
- 7. Hmong Culture in Walnut Grove**
 - a. Watch the video:** [Hmong Culture in Walnut Grove](#)
 - b. Discussion Questions:** *What is the community of Walnut Grove like? How did life change for those who lived in refugee camps and then immigrated to the U.S.? How do the Hmong people of Walnut Grove continue to connect with their culture and community? What are family structures like? What conflicts are there between generations?*
 - c. Cultural Show** - Brainstorm what cultures are represented in the classroom. Challenge students to learn about their families, cultures, and the places they came from. Put together a cultural show for families, other classrooms, the school, or the community, and show off what



students find special about their cultures. Ideas include: a fashion show, poetry reading or spoken word, talents, cultural dances, songs from various cultures, countries, or languages, etc.

8. Reflection

Following each activity, have students write a short journal response to capture their thoughts, ideas, and feelings while they are fresh. If necessary, prompt students with the following sentence stems:

- “I’m feeling...”
- “I’m thinking...”
- “I’m wondering...”

This activity guide was prepared by Chia Xiong, an elementary teacher at Roseville Area Schools, in partnership with TPT and the Minnesota Humanities Center.

To access this guide and additional resources to support teaching about America’s Secret War, visit mnvietnam.org/educator-resources/

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Handout A

**My Family's American Journey Story
Interview Questions**

1. What's your name? How are we related or how are you connected to me? *(Who's story are you going tell? Make sure to include this person's name and his/her relationship to you.)*

2. What city and country did you live in before coming to the United States?

3. What was your life like before coming to the United States?

4. What was the reason for immigrating to the U.S.?



5. When did you immigrate to the U.S.? How old were you? *(Be as specific as possible. If they don't know the exact date, give an estimate of what year or time period they immigrated.)*

6. What was the process like for you to come to the U.S.? Was it planned out? Did you have to wait? Did someone decide when you could come or not?

7. How did you get to the United States? Where did you live when you first came to the U.S.? Did anyone come with you?

8. What was life like for you the first few months or years living in the U.S.? What did you like? What didn't you like? What was hard and/or easy for you?



Handout B

**My Family's American Journey Story
Research Questions**

1. Who's story are you going tell? Include the person's name and his/her relationship to you here.

2. What city and country did this person live in before coming to the United States?

3. What was this person's life like before coming to the United States?

4. What was the reason for this person immigrating to the U.S.?



5. When did this person immigrate to the U.S.? How old was this person? *(Be as specific as possible. If you don't know the exact date, give an estimate of what year or time period they immigrated.)*

6. What was the process like for this person to come to the U.S.? Was it planned out? Did he/she have to wait? Did someone decide when he/she could come or not?

7. How did this person get to the United States? Where did he/she live when he/she first came to the U.S.? Did anyone come with him/her?

8. What was life like for this person the first few months or years living in the U.S.? What was hard and/or easy for him/her?
