



MINNESOTA REMEMBERS  
**VIETNAM**  
AMERICA'S SECRET WAR  
EDUCATOR TOOLKIT

## Rationale for Secondary Social Studies Duty and Sacrifice

### Unit Rationale

History is often taught as a chronology of wars. When we learn speak of war, we often conjure up images of America's success stories - we learn of war as being a force for good (e.g. defeating Nazism, ending slavery, or gaining independence from an oppressive and deaf tone empire an ocean away). Yet, when it comes to our failures, our losses, we often forget. Some call it selective amnesia, others willful ignorance; whatever the reason, the effects are still the same, i.e., we have failed not only in our mission, but also in our duty to recognize and honor those who answered the call to duty, to those who sacrificed, and those who paid the ultimate price.

For this nation, it is one of seemingly continuous victories - one's that are "turning points;" not only for this nation (e.g. the Revolutionary War), but for the world as well. While this is not a false statement, and the wars in which this nation has engaged in have quite often been for the betterment of the human race, we often forget the wars and conflicts in which this nation has lost. With that forgetfulness, that "selective amnesia," we do a disservice to the men and women who have served in this nation's armed forces. With regards to the men and women who served in Vietnam, they received no welcome home; they achieved no great victory, and their sacrifices, their calls to duty, they were not answered. The men and women who we remember to forget are U.S. citizens; yet, there is another class of soldier, one without recognition, who is not only forgotten, but who is unknown. These are the Hmong. A people who were caught in the middle of a world at war who were given an impossible choice - to fight with or against the global ideologies' proxy wars.

The War in Vietnam, and its effects are right under our noses - we just choose to ignore the scent. Minnesota is home to the largest concentration of Hmong. Not only in the country, but on the planet. Although the Hmong are here and have been a part of our communities for generations, the reasons for their presence, their narrative is largely ignored, or misunderstood. The very word "Vietnam" is challenging for our nation to say, at least in a positive note. We don't talk about it. We don't teach it, and because of this selective amnesia



we fail to recognize the contributions and the sacrifices of our soldiers, and all of those affected by this war. for our shared involvement in the Secret War. Both Hmong and American soldiers fought for various reasons (e.g. duty, patriotism - and they each made sacrifices.)

The War in Vietnam is an often misunderstood and selectively-forgotten war. Although many of the veterans still live to this day, their narratives are all too often excluded from the single, incomplete histories of the American War in Vietnam. While the United States continues to grapple with and unravel the reasons for going to war, how it was fought, asks itself why it was lost, and what the war means from the lens of the 21st Century, there are a select there is an emerging school of thought that now attempts to both add to this incomplete narrative and to find meaning in a uncomfortable, messy subject. This filmed interview is meant to begin to unravel the threads of the “Secret War,” a war that the United States government never intended to become public knowledge. It is meant to help explain how and why a people – the Hmong – both served with the United States as soldiers and then arrived to the United States as refugees. This is but one of several stories to add to the never complete tapestry of history.

The resources and activities provided in these unit plans are designed to provide not only content, but also answer the question of why this war should be taught in the first place. The effects of this war are far reaching, and its participants (and their descendants) are very much still among us. This war has a plethora of lessons to be taught, which are still repeated today. Moreover, there is an entire class of Americans whose story is still absent from the narrative of this nation.

### **Recommended Time Setting for a History Class**

- A mini unit within or after the teaching of the American Civil War would likely be appropriate to emphasize the choices that individuals, families, and societies are forced to make. Enables students to access prior knowledge of division/disagreement between nations (groups of people with varying ideologies) when covering a foreign region that many have likely never heard of.

### **Recommended Time Setting for a Citizenship and Government Class**

- Screening this film should be completed during a unit on the various types of governments (democratic and non-democratic), which can be used to help explain how countries with differing forms of governing interact with one another.

### **Recommended Time Setting for a Geography Class**

- This mini-unit could be completed while studying/creating maps and/or the 5 themes of geography. Place and location could and should be highly emphasized throughout the screening of the film. In addition, analyzing and creating maps should also be a central focus.



### Recommended Content to Pre-teach

Students must be familiar with the Cold War prior to viewing this film. A lesson, or lessons covering the following would be helpful to students unfamiliar with the following:

- WWII/Cold War
- Types of Government (democratic and non-democratic)
- Containment and the Domino Theory (a comparison of Laos being the “cork in the wine bottle” is referenced in the film by Pao)

### Recommended Unit Planning:

- Roughly 4-5 classes of 45 - 60 minutes in length are recommended to cover the activities and film(s).
  - **Day One:**
    - Concept map
    - Digital Shorts 1 - 3
    - Discussions (as needed)
  - **Day Two:**
    - Screening of *MN Remembers Vietnam*
    - Optional: Chong Thao’s film questions
  - **Days Three - Four:**
    - Introduction to and modeling of Story Wall
    - Independent and/or partnered research
  - **Day Four or Five:**
    - Socratic seminar

This activity guide was prepared by Michael Paulson, a high school social studies teacher for Intermediate District 287, 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/resources/](http://mnvietnam.org/resources/)

© 2019 TPT and Minnesota Humanities Center