

Vietnam War

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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Grade Level: High School (can easily be adapted for 5th grade & high school World History)

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Visit <https://sos.tn.gov/tsla/education> for additional lesson plans.



Introduction: The Vietnam War was a costly conflict between the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, the Viet Cong, and South Vietnam, allied with the United States from 1961 until 1973. This lesson relies on the Christopher D. Ammons Vietnam War Collection at TSLA to explore the experience of one American soldier during this conflict using primary sources such as letters and photographs.

Guiding Questions:

- What do primary sources such as photographs and letters tell us about the Vietnam War?
- What was life like for soldiers serving in the Vietnam War?
- How was the Vietnam War similar and different from other American wars?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will

- Compare and contrast other wars in American history with the Vietnam War by analyzing several different TSLA photography collections and completing a chart.
- Construct a list of questions about the Vietnam War and will try to answer those questions by evaluating letters from the Christopher D. Ammons collection.
- Analyze and reflect upon a photograph from the Christopher D. Ammons collection by completing the [Worksheet for Analysis of a Photograph](#).
- Compose a letter based upon a Christopher D. Ammons' photograph and will examine the causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War by including at least three of the following in the letter: Geneva Accords · Gulf of Tonkin Resolution · Tet Offensive · Roles played by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon · Vietnamization · Ho Chi Minh · Bombing of Cambodia · Henry Kissinger · Napalm and Agent Orange.
- Complete a response letter from the home front while evaluating the issues of the Anti-War movement, draft by lottery, and the role of television and the media.

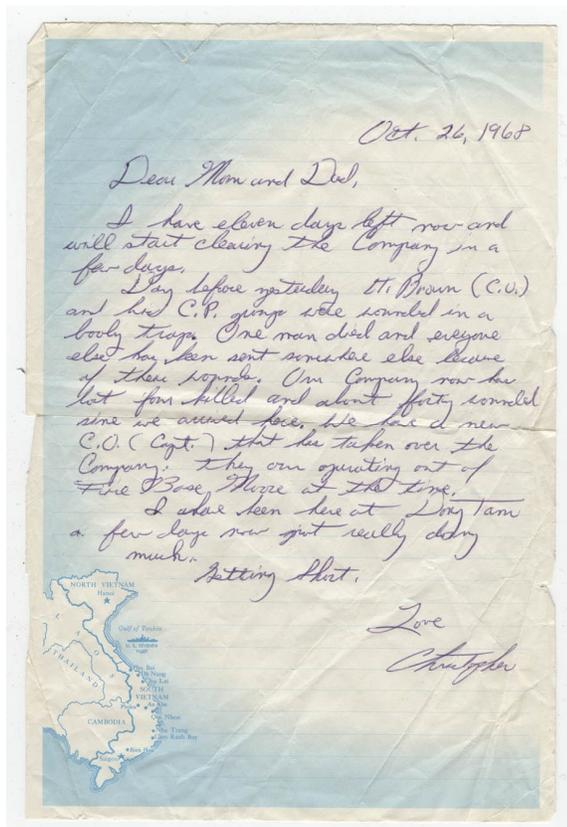
Curriculum Standards:

US.66- Describe the causes, course, & consequences of the Vietnam War, including the following: Geneva Accords · Gulf of Tonkin Resolution · Tet Offensive · Vietnamization · Ho Chi Minh · Bombing of Cambodia · Napalm and Agent Orange

US.68- Evaluate the impact of the Vietnam War on the home front, including: the anti-war movement, draft by lottery, and the role of television and the media.

Common Core Grade 11-12 ELA Standards:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



Materials Needed:

- Access to TSLA website and the [Christopher D. Ammons Vietnam War Collection](#)
- Copies of the letters and photographs from the collection
- Copies or access to the background information on Christopher D. Ammons
- Copies of [Worksheet for Analysis of a Written Document](#)
- Copies of [Worksheet for Analysis of a Photograph](#)
- Access to TSLA website and the [Civil War Soldier Photographs Collection](#), [Tennessee in World War I Collection](#), and [The Volunteer State Goes to War: A Salute to Tennessee Veterans Collection](#).

Background: [Battlefield: Vietnam](#)

Source Location: pbs.org

Lesson Activities:

Introductory Activity

Students will be divided into pairs with access to the TSLA website and the Civil War Soldier Photographs Collection, Tennessee in World War I Collection, The Volunteer State Goes to War: A Salute to Tennessee Veterans Collection, and the Christopher D. Ammons Vietnam War Collection. Students will spend time viewing photographs from several different wars in American History such as the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam. Students should be looking for similarities and differences between the Vietnam War and other wars based upon the photographs and previously learned material. Students will complete the following chart:

Fighting the war in Vietnam was <i>similar</i> to fighting in other wars in American History:	Fighting the war in Vietnam was <i>different</i> from fighting in other wars in American History:

Present and share answers as a large group discussion.

Instruction and Class Activity:

The teacher should provide classroom notes, discussion, textbook reading assignments, and/or background information on the Vietnam War before completing the activity. Students should also review the background information on Christopher D. Ammons.

In large group, students will brainstorm a list of questions that they would like to ask a Vietnam soldier. The questions should be displayed in a prominent location with space to provide answers.

The teacher should provide copies of the letters in the Christopher D. Ammons Collection for students to read and discuss. Two options on displaying the letters for students to read: (1) students will be divided into small groups with copies of the letters given to each group to read and discuss or (2) Gallery Walk - the letters are posted on the classroom walls for students to move from letter to letter at their own pace. As students read and discuss the letters, students should try to answer their questions on the brainstorming list based upon the information provided by Christopher D. Ammons and his experiences in Vietnam. As soon as a student finds a possible answer to a question, he or she should write the direct quote under the question(s). After enough time has lapsed, students should be given the opportunity to discuss their findings as a class. The teacher should allow the letters, questions, and answers to remain on display for the next assignment.

The teacher will provide each student with a copy of a different photograph from the Christopher D. Ammons Collection. Individually, the student is to complete the [Worksheet for Analysis of a Photograph](#) for his or her photograph by answering at least ten of the most relevant questions or the teacher may assign certain questions for the students to answer.

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Lesson Activities:

Assessment:

- Students are to pretend that they are serving in the Vietnam War. The student is to write a letter home (using the Ammons' letters as references) based upon their individual photograph. In the letter, the students are to include factual information from their class notes and must include at least 3 of following: Geneva Accords · Gulf of Tonkin Resolution · Tet Offensive · Roles played by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon · Vietnamization · Ho Chi Minh · Bombing of Cambodia · Henry Kissinger · Napalm and Agent Orange. Letters with the photograph should be placed on display for students to read or present to class.
- Students exchange the assessment letters and then write a response letter back to student describing what is happening on the home front. Must include information about the impact of the Vietnam War on the home front, including the Anti-War movement, draft by lottery, and the role of television and the media.



Assessment and Enrichment Options:

- Students add a map to their letter labeling their locations (as contained in letters and photographs) in comparison to other important locations.
- Interview a Vietnam Veteran - ask the same questions created during the brainstorming session and then compare and contrast answers with the answers from the Christopher D. Ammons Collection letters.
- Using the diagrams from the [Handbook for U.S. Forces in Vietnam](#) (located in the Christopher D. Ammons Collection at TSLA), students build a model of the diagrams and explain how the models/diagrams were utilized. Research to find out how and if these diagrams were effective in Vietnam. Present to class.
- Students should view the [Chieu Hoi leaflets](#) as a class or individually. Discuss what the leaflets were used for, why, and where they were disseminated during the Vietnam War. Students are then to create their own leaflets to be distributed in areas of conflict today such as Iraq and Afghanistan.