

**Oakland Museum of California**  
*What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era*  
**Lesson Plan #2**

**1968: Year of Social Change and Turning Point in Vietnam and the U.S.**

**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–1968

**Grade/Level:** 11

**Learning Goals for Students to Accomplish**

What students will know and be able to do:

- Understand social and political factors that created an international and domestic crisis in 1968.
- Understand the connection between the war and social movements, including the cultural upheaval in the U.S.
- Strengthen skills in group and independent research through a timeline and an Internet research project.
- Work with primary documents, paying attention to bias and balancing multiple perspectives.
- Place oral histories of veterans of the period, including Vietnamese and Southeast Asians, within the context of historical events, and understand the contributions of individuals to historic events.
- Learn how to conduct oral histories with veterans of the period to understand how the Vietnam War impacted their perspectives and their lives.
- Evaluate similar social pressures and outcomes today.
- Understand ways in which California is a microcosm of the national experience.

**Essential Question:** In 1968, what transformed the debate over U.S. policy in Vietnam from a disagreement to a crisis of U.S. society?

**Summary**

1968 was a time of social, cultural, and political change in the U.S. In this lesson, students will have an opportunity to evaluate the qualitative shifts in American culture and politics during the crucial year of 1968 through the study of primary sources and historical analyses. They will also use their oral history skills to gather their own evidence—from Vietnam vets and other veterans of



the period; from Black Panthers and other African American activists; from American Indian, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian American activists; and from immigrants from Southeast Asia. Students will develop their own analyses of the fundamental transformations of 1968 and the way these changes have shaped our national identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The year 1968 is important because it marked, with a number of national events, a change in national direction of major proportion. The Tet Offensive in Vietnam demonstrated to Americans a U.S. military vulnerability contrary to the government's optimistic reports. The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy disheartened the public's beliefs in the infallibility of its national leaders and made the nation itself appear vulnerable. The transformation of the African American movement from one for civil rights to one for black power—as the center of the struggle moved from the rural South to the urban North—signaled a dramatic turn of events. Chicano activists were organizing in the fields of the Southwest as well as the cities with the coming of the Brown Berets. Other ethnic organizations also signaled an identification with third world revolution, such as the indigenous American Indian Movement, the Puerto Rican Young Lords Organization, and the Asian American I Wor Kuen. Lyndon Johnson shocked the nation by deciding not to run for a second term and the subsequent Democratic Convention in Chicago turned into a massive domestic disturbance that led to deep distrust of the police.

Finally, a strong conservative tendency in the country and a backlash against the radical movements were seen in the growing conservative movement. The nation elected California Republican Richard Nixon as president, but not before an initiative was mounted to have Ronald Reagan, then California's governor, elected president. This initiative was a clear indication of the growth of the conservative movement and was a powerful expansion of the far right that continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Learning Context**

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

### **Time Allotment**

This can be a two-week project or can take additional class periods, depending on how elaborate your plan.

**Sample Student Products:** Oral histories, written and oral reports, 1968 timeline, Internet-based research

### **Author's Comments & Reflections**

This lesson assumes students have already conducted an introductory study of the Vietnam War era. There are many steps and activities here. Teachers using this plan should feel free to shorten or eliminate parts of it. This plan ends with a case study of the year 1968, both in Vietnam and in the U.S. The main activities are:

- Viewing and analyzing the film *Hearts and Minds*
- Reading analysis on the Tet Offensive
- Constructing timelines with various foci
- Conducting oral history analysis
- Conducting Internet research
- Final reflection



Of course, you may pick whatever resources work for you or you may 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. during the crucial year 1968. It leaves out much more of this complex era than it includes, such as details on the Vietnam War itself, the perspectives of the Vietnamese (of the Communist side and the Republic of Vietnam side), and other social factors in the U.S. What was occurring in Southeast Asia impacted the events in California and the nation in 1968. The purpose of this study is to root students in a multilayered examination of a pivotal historical period. And this you can do with whatever adaptations, additions, or deletions you wish.

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

### **Anticipatory Set**

Note: Students will keep a field journal throughout this process in which they can record notes about the readings, documentary film, oral history project, timeline, and their research.

1. Students view a documentary and read from different texts.
  - a. Students view *Hearts and Minds*, a documentary presenting opposing viewpoints about the Vietnam War. This provides a review of America’s involvement in Vietnam. The principal idea for the documentary, says director Peter Davis, is to focus on three questions:
    - Why did we go there?
    - What did we do there?
    - What did the “doing,” in turn, do to us?

Each sequence, Davis goes on to say, would have something to do with one of the three focus questions, not necessarily answering it, but certainly addressing the question. These three focus questions are the same ones that today’s students might ask to help them understand this historical period. Students keep notes during the showing of the film. See the handout **Character Tracking for *Hearts and Minds*** included in Student Handouts.

- b. Students address the discussion questions on the film and take part in a brief class discussion at the end of each class. See Student Handout **Discussion Questions for *Hearts and Minds***. Seeing *Hearts and Minds* as a review of the Vietnam War helps students build historical context, an essential step for achieving the second purpose: using the diverse and multiple voices of the oral histories in this film in context to help students construct a more accurate history of the Vietnam War and the crucial year of 1968. Students also evaluate the perspective and bias in the film itself.

Taking notes and answering questions about these multiple voices and the emotions revealed on the speakers’ faces and in their body language and gestures will invite students to ultimately connect various impressions and form their own meaningful responses to the focus questions: Why did we go there? What did we do there? What did the doing, in turn, do to us? This process of analysis and interpretation of Peter Davis’s use of oral histories will thus help prepare students to do their own Vietnam War era oral history projects.



- c. Divided into study groups, students read chapters on the Tet Offensive and the transformation of the war from various points of view. Each group gives a short report on what they learned about the Tet Offensive and the turning point in the war.
- “The Funeral,” introduction from *The Bright Shining Lie, John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, by Neil Sheehan
  - “Tet,” Chapter 14, from *Vietnam: A History*, by Stanley Karnow
  - “The Tet Offensive,” Chapter 15, from *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, by Frances FitzGerald
  - “The Power of Truth,” Chapter 13, from *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, by Daniel Ellsberg
  - Vietnamese perspectives. Students may also use the excerpts from two Vietnamese perspectives—**General Vo Nguyen Giap** and **More About the 1968 Tet Offensive** (from the South Vietnamese perspective) included in Student Handouts.
- d. Students discuss the impact of these events on public opinion in the U.S. From a purely military perspective, the battles of Tet were a defeat for the Communist forces. In fact, many claimed that every encounter with the guerrillas was a victory for the Americans. Have students consider these questions:
- Why, then, was it such a turnaround?
  - Were people just ignorant of the war’s trend and tide?
  - Or did the military men underestimate the power of psychological, moral, and political factors in the ability of the U.S. to continue waging the war?
  - What kind of response to Tet do you think there might be from soldiers, draft-age students, African Americans active in the Civil Rights Movement, and political conservatives?

## 2. 1968 Timeline Project

See **1968 Timeline** included in Student Handouts. It provides a detailed timeline for major events of 1968, including war-related events, Civil Rights and Black Panther Party events, and national political events.

Each group views the museum’s timeline and extrapolates only those events specific to its focus area (i.e., war-related events, Civil Rights and Black Panther Party events, and national political events), which either the teacher or the class has determined. Each group produces a smaller timeline on the designated focus area.

In order to work efficiently, each group selects individual members, based on their leadership strengths and talents, for the responsibilities described in the **Student Group Project** handout available under Student Handouts. Also distribute **Guidelines for Completing Timelines** included in Student Handouts.



## Modeling: Oral History Planning

1. Historical evidence: Review the interviews from *Hearts and Minds*. Discuss with the class how evidence is gathered, how history is written. View 1968 war footage from *Vietnam: A Television History*. Students sort through Oakland Museum of California oral history evidence. Students read the oral histories of Irv Sarnoff, David Harris and John Burns, Barbara Sonneborn, Doug Ryan, David Hilliard, Judy Grahn, Margaret Salazar, Bruce Weigel, and Charley Trujillo. Conduct a class discussion on the reliability of sources and the need for multiple sources. See **oral histories** under Student Handouts.
2. Explain oral history practice, using the Oakland Museum of California's *Collecting Community History Handbook*. See the handbook excerpts that are available on the Oakland Museum of California's What's Going On lessons page at <http://www.museumca.org/wgolessons/> . To purchase the book, you can go to [http://www.museumcastore.org/curric\\_items.html](http://www.museumcastore.org/curric_items.html)

Also use the following websites:

- The Film Study Center, Harvard University, <http://www.dohistory.org/home.html>, has several web pages on working with primary sources, and, in particular, oral history.
  - The Whole World Was Watching website has a number of pages worthy of a close viewing. Refer to this particular page to see one teacher's view of a class project in which students actually conduct oral history interviews, not just analyze oral histories already completed: <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/1968/notes/sharonEssay.html>
  - PBS has another excellent website that provides both oral histories and oral history tips in its essay, "How to do an oral history about the impact of the Vietnam Era." <http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/vietnam/curriculum.html>
3. Planning Oral History Interviews. Go to Student Handouts to use the materials: **1968: Oral History Project, Essay on 1968 and Oral History** by Sharon Schmid, and **Oral History Process and Resources**. Students prepare for their oral history interviews. They can interview anyone with a memory of the era, taking care that the class mix includes soldiers, pro-war and anti-war activists, and a diversity of ethnic groups and gender. Of particular importance would be interviews with Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees in your community, those from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand—especially those of the generation that can remember 1968. Some of these interviews may be from those who were Communist or anti-Communist at the time.



### Guided Practice: Internet Research

1. Research in groups. Students research other sources on the period, focusing particularly on social changes in the U.S. in 1968. The task of the Internet research project is for the students to investigate, analyze, and reflect on their selected or assigned research topic in two days, using recommended websites (and others at the discretion of the teacher), in order to answer the unit's essential question in a class presentation:

**Essential Question:** *In 1968, what transformed the debate over U.S. policy in Vietnam from a disagreement to a crisis of U.S. society?*

2. Students have been building historical knowledge about the forces of war, society, and politics in the 1960s, first through the history textbook before beginning this unit of study, then by looking more closely at the opposing views of the war through the Vietnam War film documentary *Hearts and Minds*. The timeline project brought students still closer to some of the specific events that shaped and defined three of the forces merging in this one particular year, 1968, with such power as to shift the course of an entire nation.

**Prompt for students:** “The events of history become compelling through the voices of real people engaged in those events. Oral histories, as you are learning, ‘convey a dramatic, first hand view of history, with a storytelling approach and a sense of personal experience.’ (Bret Eynon, Ph.D, Education Director of the American Social History Project) Applying the guidelines for analyzing the oral histories and oral memoirs you find on the websites, you will gain powerful insight into the Vietnam veterans, the Black Panthers, Southeast Asian immigrants, the social activists responding to presidential politics, and others in their historical context, and ‘move beyond easy slogans to see the complexity and the human drama of the Vietnam experience (Eynon).”

3. Distribute the **Internet Research Study Group** handout available under Student Handouts. In order to work efficiently, each research team will select individual members, based on their leadership strengths and talents, for the responsibilities described in the handout.
4. Students work in groups using the **Recommended Websites for Internet Research** available under Student Handouts. They research their area of interest in groups. Students use the primary sources they can find, including oral histories on the websites. Each group reports back to the class.



### **Independent Practice: Oral History Interviews**

1. Students plan oral history interviews of veterans from the period. Using the local community, family contacts, and help from teachers and other adults, students should seek as a class to reach a cross-section of “veterans of 1968” to interview. Taken together, this becomes an ethnography of this aspect of the community. This does not just mean military veterans but everyone who lived through the period. Especially effective is to do a profile of one’s own town, neighborhood, or city—tracing back the impacts of 1968 on various sectors. Some groups to consider reaching include the following:
  - Military veterans of the war
  - Black Panthers and other African American activists
  - American Indian, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian American activists
  - Immigrants from Southeast Asia—from multiple perspectives of the conflict
  - Women—those who were directly involved and those who had indirect involvement
  - Anti-war activists
  - Conservative or “new right” activists
2. Students carry out oral history interviews. These can be elaborate (filmed and edited), moderate (taped and transcribed, with editing), or elementary (interview with notes). Preparation of a visual display (poster with photographs and quotations or video) is an important part of publishing. Still photographs of the interview subject, taken at the time of the interview and collected from the 1968 period, should also be collected.
3. Students evaluate their interview, edit and shape their interview, evaluate bias and point of view, and plan a report on their interview subject.



## **Closure: Publication of the Class Findings**

**Publishing.** Students make either a book, a wall display, a website, or other public display of their interviews and what they learned about this period. Photographs of the interview subject, in 1968 and today, can enhance such displays.

**Presentation of class-created oral histories.** Invite students to choose from several presentation options for their oral histories, including film if they have their own equipment or if the school provides it. For the group electing this option, remind them that instruction in the use of film equipment is not part of this unit. Students are often far ahead of their teachers in use of technology. For students without film experience who would like to learn, ask those with knowledge to teach their classmates, perhaps on future projects.

**Panel and audience.** The day of presentations provides an excellent opportunity to provide students with a real audience. Consider inviting parents, other teachers (during their conference periods), administrators, and community members into your classroom to hear the presentations and to also be on hand afterward to congratulate project teams.

**Class discussion and evaluation** of 1968 transformations in society. During discussion periods after each discussion, and as a final discussion, the class evaluates the impacts of the various social forces in 1968.

**Final reflection.** In addition, students write a final reflection on the unit, discussing how Vietnam and the U.S. were transformed in 1968 and why they think this happened. This can be anything from extended journal writing and a learning log to a more formal essay.

## **Follow-Up**

- Students can revisit the work on 1968 in further studies on social change and war in subsequent units.
- Consider having guests come in to speak to the students, particularly guests who were interviewed in the oral history component.
- Materials from this unit should be kept for student portfolios.



## MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

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

### Video

*Hearts and Minds*

### Texts

“The Funeral,” introduction from *The Bright Shining Lie, John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, by Neil Sheehan.

“Tet,” Chapter 14, from *Vietnam: A History*, by Stanley Karnow, Penguin Books, 1997.

“The Tet Offensive,” Chapter 15, from *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, by Frances FitzGerald, Back Bay Books, 2002.

“The Power of Truth,” Chapter 13, from *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, by Daniel Ellsberg, Penguin Books, 2003.

*What’s Going On, California and the Vietnam Era*, Marcia Eymann and Charles Wollenberg, Ed., especially the following articles: “The War at Home, California’s Struggle to Stop the Vietnam War” by Jeff Lustig; “Long, Hot Summers: The Rise of Black Protest and Black Power” by Clayborne Carson; “Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War” by George Mariscal; and “Back in the World: Vietnam Veterans, California, and the Nation” by John Burns.

Tet offensive Vietnamese Perspectives (**Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap** and **More About The 1968 Tet Offensive** included under Student Handouts).

*The Things They Carried*, Tim O’Brien. A novel that captures the ambiguities as well as the horrors of war. Broadway Publishers, 1998.

### Web resources

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

The Whole World Was Watching:

<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/1968/notes/sharonEssay.html>

PBS, How to do an oral history about the impact of the Vietnam Era:

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/vietnam/curriculum.html>

### OMCA What’s Going On? Student Handouts Lesson 2

*Collecting Community History Handbook* excerpts

Character Tracking for *Hearts and Minds*

Discussion Questions for *Hearts and Minds*

General Vo Nguyen Giap



More About the 1968 Tet Offensive

1968 Timeline

Student Group Project

Guidelines for Completing Timelines

Oral History: Irv Sarnoff

Oral History: David Harris and John Burns

Oral History: Barbara Sonneborn

Oral History: Doug Ryan

Oral History: David Hilliard

Oral History: Judy Grahn

Oral History: Margaret Salazar

Oral History: Bruce Weigel

Oral History: Charley Trujillo

Oral Histories: Vietnam War and the Tet Offensive

Oral Histories: Civil Rights and the Black Panther Party

1968: Oral History Project

Essay on 1968 and Oral History by Sharon Schmid

Oral History Process and Resources

Internet Research Study Group

Recommended Websites for Internet Research



## 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*)

Field journals, Internet-based research, an oral history project, and 1968 Timeline

Criteria for assessing field journals several times a week, once a week, or at end of unit:

- Completion of all assigned notes and reflections, plus responses to selected questions
- Quality of reflections in terms of reference to specific items learned and depth of thought about what was learned
- Accuracy of notes with sources cited appropriately (MLA or APA style)
- Progression of new knowledge constructed and used to enrich and sustain meaning strived for in reflection

Criteria for assessing timelines (you may elect not to assess this activity other than to give completion credit):

- Option 1: Field journal reflection on timelines (quality of reflections in terms of reference to specific items learned and depth of thought about what was learned)
- Option 2: Field journal one to two page critical writing to prompt: What have you learned about the Vietnam War events of 1968 in relation to the Civil Rights Movement and the events of the Black Panther Party, and to the relation of national political events?

Criteria for research team presentations at time of their occurrence:

- Enough data collected to give meaning to understanding of item researched (students assume knowing something is equivalent to understanding it, but often without meaning)
- Accuracy of information presented in response to specific question(s)
- Evidence of every member's equal participation in class research

Criteria for assessing the oral history research project:

As the culminating and most challenging assessment for the unit, assessment is more complex. First, assessment is per research team rather than individual students. Second, break the assessment into two parts:

- One set of written materials per team
- Two interviews from two focus areas or opposing views from one focus area (submit audio tape, CD, or interview notes as evidence)
- Accurate transcriptions of appropriately selected portions of two interviews
- Reflective journal writing
- Two narratives used in presentations
- Presentation/performance

Narratives are clear, compelling responses to the unit's Essential Question (rephrased for oral history interviews: How did your experience impact your thoughts about the Vietnam War?)

Narratives presented as "an individual's way of interpreting and narrating his/her experience in a particular event or period" (which serves as evidence of a clear perspective and interpretation)

