

Oakland Museum of California
What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era
Lesson Plan #3
Coming to Terms: Stories of Southeast Asian Political Refugees

LESSON OVERVIEW

Subject: U.S. or World History

Southeast Asian refugee experiences and resettlement between 1975 and the 1990s in California and the United States

Topic or Unit of Study: Vietnam War; U.S. history; Immigration

Grade/Level: 11

Learning Goals for Students to Accomplish

What students will know and be able to do:

- Understand how Southeast Asian refugees left their homeland and established a life here in the United States.
- Use oral histories of Southeast Asian refugees for students to understand the commonality of humanity through suffering and personal growth.
- Recognize ways that history is constructed, and that students participate in making history.
- Learn how to collect, document, and interpret primary resources.

Essential Question: How do Southeast Asian refugee experiences reshape our sense of what it means to be American?

Summary

Through lectures, analytical writing, Internet research, and direct interviews (primary source creation), students will gain an understanding of the history of the Southeast Asian immigrant experience and of the ongoing legacies of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

IMPLEMENTATION

Learning Context

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

Time Allotment

This can be a one or two week project, depending on how elaborate your plan and how much research you want students to conduct.

Sample Student Products: Oral history presentations, Internet-based research projects and presentations, field journals



Author's Comments & Reflections

This supplementary unit assumes an introductory study of the Vietnam War within the context of Cold War studies has already taken place. Students will thus have some of the necessary historical background with which to approach one story of that period in depth, and recognize its continuation in the present.

The purpose of this unit is to help students become knowledgeable about the more than one million Southeast Asian refugees who came to the United States after 1975, when U.S. military forces withdrew from the region. Students will study who these refugees were in post-1975 Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and why they were compelled to leave their own countries; what conditions they faced and overcame in refugee camps; and how they met the challenges of settlement in America. Through the process of research, analysis, and reflection using oral histories in context, students will study the resettlement experiences of refugees from former Indochina (French name for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), with a special focus on the more than 40% who came to California.

The Vietnam War is modern history in that it is history that many people in our communities have lived. You may find the teaching or discussion of this era in class intersecting with student stories, things they have learned from family and community members. Sometimes this is positive and sometimes this can be challenging. Some students from Southeast Asia may have a different family version of the Tet Offensive or of the Boat People exodus, and may wonder which story is right. It is important for a teacher to be sensitive to issues students may have in examining these stories. It is best, of course, to regard such feelings as “teachable moments,” times when you can help students bring their own stories and perspectives of others into positive engagement. Reflective journal writing is just one activity that can help students process this research that may contradict or resonate with their own family histories. Teachers should anticipate times when such issues may come up.

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

Peoples' stories are not the footnotes of history, they are the history.

1. Frame the unit with the Essential Question: How do Southeast Asian refugee experiences reshape our sense of what it means to be American? The unit's Essential Question sets the purpose for and also guides the class's in-depth study.

Note: During lecture and/or reading, students will use a field journal to record notes in response to items in Column 1 and questions in Column 2 of the KWL chart. These three activities—learning the historical context, note-taking, and focusing on items and questions on the KWL chart—will help set the purpose of the oral history section of this lesson. The **KWL Chart** is available under Lesson 3 Student Handouts:
http://www.museumca.org/wgolessons/pdf/lesson3/OMCA_WGO_lesson3_KWL_chart.pdf

2. Students brainstorm the Essential Question with the KWL chart. Distribute **Field Journal Guidelines** included in Student Handouts, and review guidelines for use of field journals with the whole class. For suggestions, see the OMCA publication: *Collecting Community History: A Training Handbook for*



Educators, pages 96-98: “Field Journals: an essential research tool” and “Organizing field journals.” These excerpts are available on the OMCA’s *What’s Going On?* lessons page at <http://www.museumca.org/wgolessons>. The handbook is available for purchase from the Oakland Museum of California’s online store at http://www.museumcastore.org/curric_items.html

3. Students take notes in their field journals based on a class review and discussion of the items in Column 1 of the KWL Chart. Review Column 2 as the unit progresses. Students will use the Column 3 heading as a prompt for responding to their progress in addressing questions in Column 2 for nightly homework writing in their field journals.
4. Introduce this unit as an exploration of Southeast Asian refugee experiences from 1975 to the 1990s using oral histories in context. Present a mini-lecture to the class with these key points:
 - Stories of refugees compelled to leave their countries under egregious conditions and face challenges of resettlement in America are eyewitness testimonies of people who participated in and lived through important political and cultural events of our times.
 - These oral histories and their contexts are also models for an oral history project students will undertake later in this lesson.
 - The lesson calls for thoughtful and careful record-keeping of discussions (whole class and small group), research findings, analysis, and reflections.
 - Other key points you want to emphasize from your reading of the unit’s historical context for Southeast Asian refugees.

Homework: Students review class notes in their field journals and write a reflection to the prompt: What I Learned and What I Think About What I Learned.



Modeling

1. To build historical context for oral history analysis, distribute Professor Um's history essay **Our Journeys, Our Communities: Southeast Asians in American History** included in Student Handouts. This is a follow-up reading to your class lecture as a way to reinforce key points for study.
2. Assign students to four Internet research teams for a brief session on knowledge sharing in response to Columns 1 and 2 on the **KWL Chart**.
3. Students begin their Internet research project—oral histories from Southeast Asian refugees.

Remind students that the task of their Internet research project is to apply oral history guidelines to oral histories and personal stories of Southeast Asian refugees organized by country, using recommended websites (and others at your discretion), in order to answer the unit's essential question in a class presentation:

Essential Question: How do Southeast Asian refugee experiences reshape our sense of what it means to be American?

As a prompt for students, you can present these key points:

You have been building historical knowledge about diverse Southeast Asian refugees from their perspectives, keeping in mind what you already know or have learned more about when considering American perspectives on the Vietnam War. Your research team discussions and the reflective writings in your field journals have invited you to reflect not just on what you have learned, but also on what you think about what you have learned; thereby making possible a recognition of connections between yourself and what Southeast Asian refugees went through to become Americans. The oral histories you are now researching speak directly to you. They do not go through a historian or other interpreter guiding your thinking about what you are listening to.

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, Education Director of the American Social History Project) In applying the guidelines for analyzing the oral histories and oral memoirs on the recommended websites, you will gain powerful insight into the struggles and achievements of the refugees moving beyond superficial experiences to see the complexity and the human drama of individuals.

Explain to the research teams that over these next two days, they will complete an Internet-based research project and presentation on the historical background of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Distribute: **Topics with Resources For Internet-Based Research On Southeast Asian Countries and the Vietnam War**, and **Internet Research Project—Oral Histories from Southeast Asian Refugees**, both available under Student Handouts. **The Internet Research Project** handout includes information for accessing various oral histories, some of which are available as Student Handouts on the OMCA What's Going On? lessons site.



Research teams may want to jigsaw research topics for efficient use of class research time.

Teams will have their members working on different responsibilities. This will mean that members of one group will be in different locations in the classroom. To minimize chaos, arrange for each group to claim a section of the classroom as their own, not to be trespassed by students outside of that group. Group members can then more easily travel between their home base and the classroom computers. Distribute **Internet-Based Research Project Guidelines for Working Collaboratively**, available under Student Handouts, which will help clarify their roles and responsibilities.

The individual team members or team partners record Internet data in field journals, then share findings with whole research team where responses to **KWL Chart** items and questions are discussed and additional field journal notes are taken.

Homework: Individual team members continue research outside of class and record all research data under appropriate subheadings in the field journals.

4. When students gather in their research teams for the second day, distribute **Guidelines for Internet Research Team Presentation**, available under Student Handouts.

Guided Practice

1. With your help, students plan and arrange oral history interviews with immigrants from Southeast Asia. For schools with no Southeast Asian refugee families in the community, check the websites listed in this lesson for contact information with organizations representing refugee families. Students can contact the organizations, explaining their assignment and asking to be put in contact with individuals who would be willing to be interviewed by them.
2. To build more historical context, distribute and review **Guidelines for Using Oral Histories** available under Student Handouts.
3. To help students prepare to conduct their oral histories, distribute **Oral History Process and Resources**, available under Student Handouts, and discuss the process with the class. You can use the information in this handout as well as from the websites listed in the handout as a basis for this discussion. During the discussion, students record notes in their field journals.
4. Distribute **Southeast Asian Refugee Oral History Presentation: Guidelines for Working Collaboratively** available under Student Handouts.



Independent Practice

1. Each research team will complete an Oral History Project made up of the following entries to be submitted at the project's conclusion:
 - Written or recorded records of two interviews of individuals who experienced two of the three focus areas (life in home country post-1975, coping with physical conditions in refugee camps, struggles and achievements resettling in America)
 - Field journal notes
 - Transcription of several interview portions (rather than the whole interview)
 - Reflective journal entry: Self-Assessment of Interview Debriefing
 - Oral history narrative constructed from interview(s) (two interviews combined into one narrative or two oral history narratives based on two interviews) that answers the Essential Question: *How does our knowledge and understanding of Southeast Asian refugee experiences reshape our sense of being American?*

Explain to the students that everything they have worked on up to this time has been in preparation for “doing oral history.” Explain that they will present their completed projects at the end of the last day of the unit. You can discuss the criteria for assessment of this project as described in the “Assessment” section of this lesson.

2. Students conduct their oral history interviews.

Note: Students do not have a lot of time to complete this project. They must be willing to work cohesively as a team, using each other's strengths to get different parts of the job done.

Closure: Presentations

Invite students to choose from several presentation options, including film if they have their own equipment, or if the school provides it. If a group elects this option, remind them that instruction in the use of video equipment is not part of this unit. Students are often far ahead of their teachers in use of technology.

Each student group presents their findings to the class, including the results from their Internet research as well as their oral histories.

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.



MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Instructional Materials

- Video projection
- Tape recorders
- Digital video cameras, video editing software, computer with CD or DVD burner, blank CD or DVD discs (optional)
- Field journals and KWL Charts
- Internet access with multiple computers

OMCA What's Going On? Student Handouts Lesson 3

- Khatharya Um, "Our Journeys, Our Communities: Southeast Asians in American History"
- Topics with Resources For Internet-Based Research On Southeast Asian Countries and the Vietnam War
- Internet Research Project—Oral Histories from Southeast Asian Refugees
- Internet-Based Research Project Guidelines for Working Collaboratively
- Guidelines for Internet Research Team Presentation
- Guidelines for Using Oral Histories
- Oral History Process and Resources
- Southeast Asian Refugee Oral History Presentation: Guidelines for Working Collaboratively
- Oral History: Vu Hong Pham
- Oral History Ham Tran
- Oral History: Anh Phong
- Oral History: Lam Nguyen



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):

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 sited appropriately (MLA or APA style)
- Progression of new knowledge constructed and used to enrich and sustain meaning strived for in reflection

Criteria for research team presentations at time of their occurrence:

- Five to eight minute presentation time of data gathered from research and organized for maximizing audience understanding (for example, numbering key points, using charts, including a glossary, writing on the board, and illustrations as visual aids)
- Thoroughness and accuracy of information presented in response to specific question(s) from KWL Chart, Column 2
- Evidence of every member's 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 for 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 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 their experience in a particular event or period" (which serves as evidence of a clear perspective and interpretation)

