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HVL LESSON TITLE:

THE WAR AFTER THE WAR

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

THE WAR AFTER WAR: PTSD AND VIETNAM VETERANS

GUIDING QUESTION:

**What was responsible for PTSD
in Vietnam veterans?**

OVERVIEW:

This lesson introduces students to the psychological effects of war by examining Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among American veterans of the Vietnam War. Through primary sources, personal narratives, historical analysis, and classroom discussion, students will develop an understanding of PTSD as both a medical condition and a social issue connected to war.



SUBJECT(S):
Psychology



VIETNAM VETERAN:
Richard Knight



DURATION:
60 minutes

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“He yelled out that he wanted his Mama. Mama! Mama! I will never forget that.”

Vietnam Veteran Richard Knight

OVERVIEW:

This lesson introduces students to the psychological effects of war by examining Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among American veterans of the Vietnam War. Through primary sources, personal narratives, historical analysis, and classroom discussion, students will develop an understanding of PTSD

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

More than 2.7 million Americans served in Vietnam between the early 1960s and 1975. Soldiers faced difficult combat conditions that included guerrilla warfare, jungle environments, constant uncertainty, and exposure to violence on a daily basis. Unlike earlier wars with clearly defined battle lines, the Vietnam War often involved hidden enemies, surprise attacks, and the inability to distinguish civilians from combatants. These conditions created extreme mental and emotional stress for many service members.

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association officially recognized Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). This recognition marked a major turning point in understanding combat trauma and led to expanded research, counseling, and support services for veterans.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Define Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Explain how combat experiences in the Vietnam War contributed to PTSD
- Analyze the psychological impact of war on soldiers
- Evaluate how society responded to returning veterans
- Interpret primary sources related to veterans' experiences

STANDARDS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas of a source and summarize key details.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate differing points of view regarding historical events and mental health issues.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Richard Knight HVL Video](#)

Intro Slip (Doc A)

Directed Notes and Activity (Doc B)

Exit Slip (Doc C)

Teacher Key (Doc D)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Show students the [Richard Knight HVL video](#).
- Distribute the Intro Slip (Doc A). Inform students that PTSD is a mental health condition caused by experiencing or witnessing traumatic events. Discuss.

ACTIVITY 02

- Distribute the Directed Notes and Activity (Doc B). Teacher will utilize the directed notes to guide students through the notes section. **NOTE:** Use teacher discretion in completing the Primary Source Analysis portion of Doc. B.

ACTIVITY 03

- Distribute Exit Slip (Doc C).

IDEAS FOR EXTENSION

- Research modern treatment methods for PTSD
- Compare PTSD in Vietnam veterans vs. recent conflicts
- Analyze how PTSD is portrayed in media

WAR AFTER THE WAR

VIDEO SLIP

DOC A



DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions.

What are some symptoms of PTSD?

Do all wounds heal when soldiers return home? Explain your answer.

What kinds of injuries do soldiers experience that might not be visible?

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DIRECTED NOTES AND ACTIVITY

DOC B



Key Vocabulary:

1. Trauma: _____

2. PTSD: _____

3. Flashback: _____

4. Anxiety: _____

5. Reintegration: _____

6. Stigma: _____

Many Vietnam soldiers faced:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Upon returning home, these veterans faced the following:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

PTSD was _____ recognized until _____ on the DSM.

Primary Source Analysis

Source 1: Vietnam Veteran Oral History (Library of Congress Veterans History Project)

“When I came back, I couldn’t just turn it off. The war stayed with me. I’d hear a car backfire and hit the ground before I even realized where I was.”

Questions:

1. What symptom of PTSD is shown in this quote?
2. What does this reveal about how the veteran experiences everyday life?

Source 2: Veteran Testimony, 1970s

“We didn’t talk about it. Nobody wanted to hear it. You just kept it inside and tried to move on—but it didn’t go away.”

Questions:

3. What challenge does this veteran describe about returning home?
4. How might this lack of support affect mental health?

Source 3: Born on the Fourth of July by Ron Kovic

“I felt alone, like I had come back from a different world that no one could understand.”

Questions:

5. What emotion is expressed in this quote?
6. Why might veterans feel disconnected from others?
7. How do these primary sources help us better understand veterans’ experiences?

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EXIT SLIP



DOC C

Directions: Write a two paragraph response to the following question:
What responsibility does society have to support veterans with PTSD?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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TEACHER KEY

DOC D



Key Vocabulary:

1. Trauma: **Emotional shock following a disturbing experience**
2. PTSD: **A mental health condition triggered by experiencing a terrifying event**
3. Flashback: **A sudden, vivid memory of a past traumatic event**
4. Anxiety: **Extreme worry or fear**
5. Reintegration: **The process of returning to normal life after a major experience**
6. Stigma: **Negative attitudes or beliefs about something**

Many Vietnam soldiers faced:

1. Guerrilla warfare
2. Unclear front lines
3. Constant stress and fear
4. Difficult environmental conditions

Upon returning home, these veterans faced the following:

1. **Many veterans were not widely celebrated**
2. **Faced public division and protest**
3. **Limited mental health support at the time**

PTSD was **NOT** recognized until **1980** on the DSM.

Primary Source Answers:

1. **Hypervigilance / exaggerated startle response / flashbacks**
2. **The veteran reacts to normal sounds as if still in danger; daily life feels unsafe**
3. **Lack of support and inability to talk about experiences**
4. **Can lead to isolation, worsening PTSD symptoms, and emotional distress**
5. **Loneliness / isolation**
6. **Civilians did not share their experiences; society was divided about the war**
7. **They provide firsthand insight into emotions and struggles veterans faced**