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HVL LESSON TITLE:

AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE: A DBQ

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE

GUIDING QUESTION:

**To what extent were relationships
between American soldiers
and South Vietnamese civilians
positive or negative during the
Vietnam War?**

OVERVIEW:

During the Vietnam War, American soldiers and the South Vietnamese civilians were forced to co-exist in a volatile environment. This lesson utilizes a Document Based Question (DBQ) essay to give students the opportunity to evaluate primary sources to answer the following question: To that extent were relationships between American soldiers and South Vietnamese civilians positive or negative during the Vietnam War?



SUBJECT(S):
Social Studies



Vietnam Veteran:
TC Dawson



DURATION:
60 minutes

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“She was like our little sister. She took care of two or three houses. We would pool our money on payday to get her something nice, like an umbrella.”

Vietnam Veteran, TC Dawson

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

During the Vietnam War, the United States sent troops to support South Vietnam and prevent the spread of communism. American soldiers frequently interacted with South Vietnamese civilians, leading to a wide range of experiences—from cooperation and aid to fear, mistrust, and violence.

OBJECTIVES:

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

- Students will analyze primary sources from the Vietnam War.
- Students will utilize writing skills to write a historical essay.

STANDARDS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine central ideas of primary/secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2: Write informative/explanatory texts.

AL SS: 11: 13c

Describe how significant events in the Vietnam War resulted in a decline of public support for American involvement in the conflict. (including Tet Offensive, guerrilla tactics, My Lai Massacre, secret bombings of Cambodia and Laos, Pentagon Papers).

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Vietnam Veteran TC Dawson HVL Video](#)

Feelings Activity (Doc A)

DBQ Documents (Doc B)

DBQ Directions/Graphic Organizer (Doc C)

Essay Tips and Directions (Doc D)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Distribute the Feelings Activity (Doc A). Instruct students to complete the activity while watching the video on Vietnam Veteran, TC Dawson.
- Show students the [TC Dawson HVL Video](#).
- Discuss the feelings students circled in the activity.

ACTIVITY 02

- Tell students that today they will be analyzing primary sources to answer the question: To that extent were relationships between American soldiers and South Vietnamese civilians positive or negative during the Vietnam War?
- Distribute the DBQ (Doc B) and DBQ Graphic Organizer (Doc C). **NOTE:** Teacher can determine whether or not to complete the analysis of sources and answer the following questions as a class or assign the task as individual work and discuss the answers to the questions when all students have completed the analysis.

ACTIVITY 03

- Distribute the Essay Tips and Directions (Doc D). Read tips and directions aloud as students read along. Instruct students to write the DBQ essay.

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FEELINGS ACTIVITY

DOC A



DIRECTIONS: As you watch the video on Vietnam veteran, TC Dawson, circle the words that match your feelings in the moment.

PLEASANT FEELINGS

OPEN	HAPPY	ALIVE	GOOD	LOVE	INTERESTED	POSITIVE	STRONG
understanding	great	playful	calm	loving	concerned	eager	impulsive
confident	joyous	courageous	peaceful	considerate	affected	keen	free
reliable	lucky	energetic	at ease	affectionate	fascinated	earnest	sure
easy	fortunate	liberated	comfortable	sensitive	intrigued	intent	certain
amazed	delighted	optimistic	pleased	tender	absorbed	inspired	rebellious
free	overjoyed	impulsive	encouraged	devoted	inquisitive	determined	unique
sympathetic	gleeful	free	clever	attracted	engrossed	excited	dynamic
interested	thankful	animated	surprised	passionate	curious	enthusiastic	tenacious
satisfied	important	spirited	content	admiration	drawn toward	bold	hardy
receptive	festive	thrilled	quiet	warm		brave	secure
accepting	ecstatic	wonderful	certain	touched		daring	confident
kind	glad		relaxed	close		optimistic	challenged
	cheerful		serene	comforted			
	elated		reassured	loved			
	jubilant						

UNPLEASANT FEELINGS

ANGRY	DEPRESSED	CONFUSED	HELPLESS	INDIFFERENT	AFRAID	HURT	SAD
irritated	lousy	upset	incapable	insensitive	fearful	crushed	tearful
enraged	disappointed	doubtful	alone	dull	terrified	tormented	sorrowful
hostile	discouraged	uncertain	paralyzed	nonchalant	suspicious	deprived	pained
insulting	ashamed	indecisive	fatigued	neutral	anxious	pained	grief
annoyed	powerless	perplexed	useless	reserved	alarmed	tortured	anguish
upset	diminished	embarrassed	inferior	weary	panic	dejected	desolate
hateful	guilty	hesitant	vulnerable	bored	nervous	rejected	desperate
offensive	dissatisfied	shy	empty	preoccupied	scared	injured	pessimistic
bitter	miserable	stupefied	forced	cold	worried	offended	unhappy
aggressive	detestable	disillusioned	hesitant	disinterested	frightened	afflicted	lonely
resentful	repugnant	unbelieving	despair	lifeless	timid	aching	grieved
inflamed	despicable	skeptical	frustrated		shaky	victimized	mournful
provoked	disgusting	distrustful	distressed		restless	heartbroken	dismayed
incensed	abominable	misgiving	woeful		doubtful	agonized	
infuriated	terrible	lost	pathetic		threatened	appalled	
cross	in despair	unsure	tragic		cowardly	humiliated	
worked up	sulky	uneasy	in a stew		quaking	wronged	
boiling	bad	pessimistic	dominated		wary	alienated	
fuming		tense					

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DBQ

DOC B



DIRECTIONS: Read and analyze each primary source and answer the questions that follow.

Document A:

“They say there was a rocket attack here 3 nights ago. Landed about a ¼ mile away in an open field. Guess it was for harassment. Our interior compound is guarded by new in country enlisted personnel. They are so nervous that I tend to be a little hesitant about walking outside at night. I woke up this morning to a B52 air strike. It shook the ground, found out it was 13 miles away. They have a lot of SV (South Vietnamese) citizens working here. They go through rigid security checks before coming in every morning.

Our billet is quite secure, about 50' x 20”
John Cook, Vietnam Veteran
Norman, Oklahoma

What do the SV citizens go through upon reporting to work on the base?

What does the inclusion of the phrase : “They have a lot of SV citizens working here. They go through rigid security checks before coming in every morning.” following the description of an air strike, imply about Tom’s or the Americans’ skepticism of the SV citizens?

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DBQ

Document B:



Original caption: Special Forces Activities. Vietnamese children sit in a Special Forces jeep while members of Det A, 344th, 5th Sp. Forces Gp, 1st Sp Forces, visit their village to check the living conditions at the Refugee Camp located near Camp Bunard. *National Archives Photo*

What do you notice about the children in this photograph?

What do you think the American Special Forces were looking for during the sweep of the village?

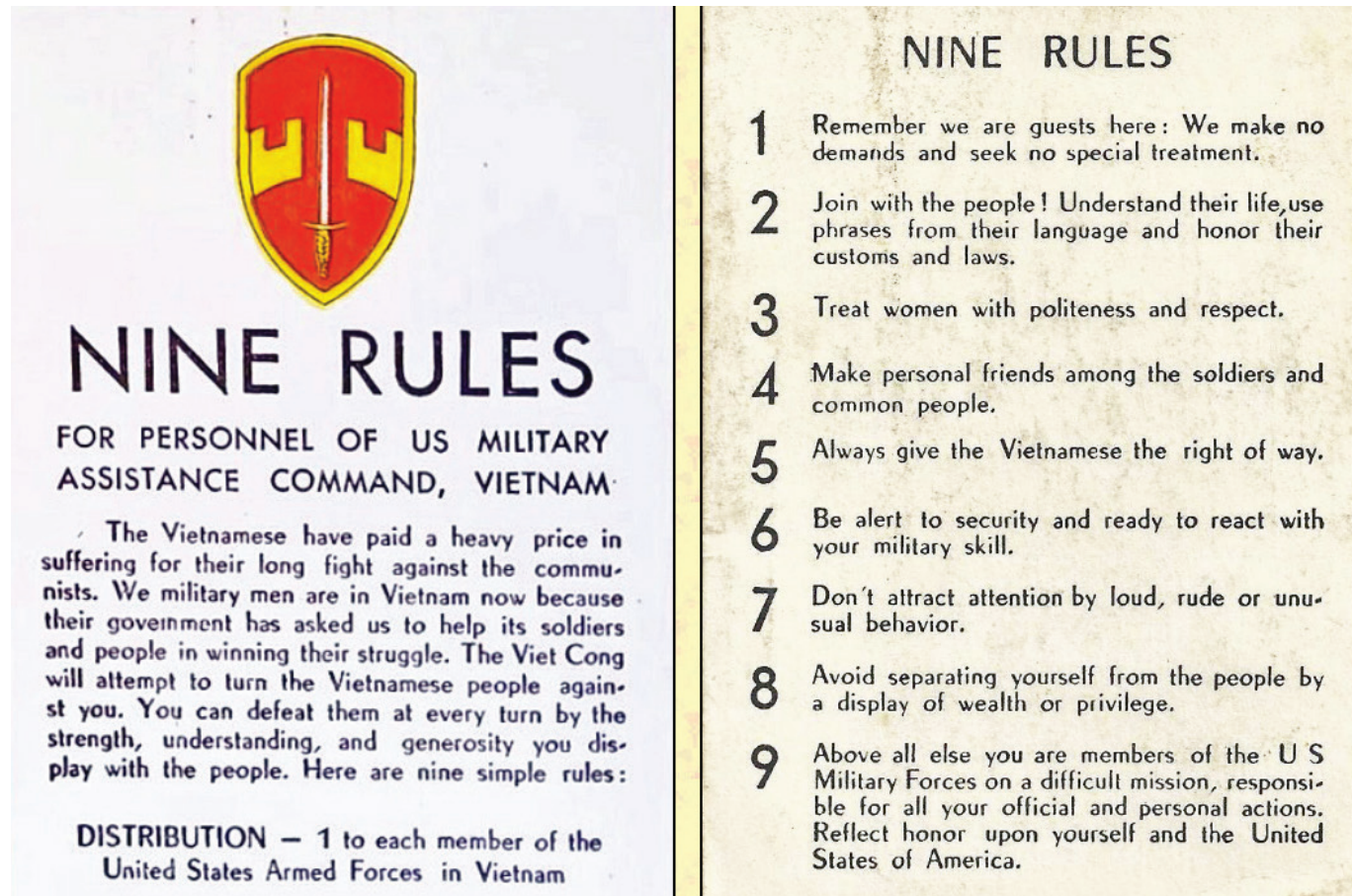
Why would the American Special Forces force children to sit in a Jeep while they conducted a sweep of the village?

How might these village sweeps affect trust?

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DBQ

Document C:



The pamphlet above was a part of the military's Hearts and Minds program, a comprehensive effort to win the loyalty of the South Vietnamese rural population. This strategy aimed to provide security, economic development, and social services. *Printed with permission by SGM Herb Friedman (Ret.)*

How would you describe the Nine Rules?

What was the goal of the Hearts and Minds effort?

How might civilians react positively?

What limitations might these efforts have?

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DBQ

Document D:

John “Johnnie” Jacobi was a specialist 5 in the 66th Engineering Company. He received this letter from a young South Vietnamese lady in November 1968. <https://historynet.com/vietnam-letters/>

“Dear Jacobi,

“How are you? I write letter for today – you happy now Jacobi? Long time no write letter because I have very much work, I am sorry.

“Now you living same same formerly and do you have children – can’t I happy too.

“Jacobi are you happy now, because you not have to comeback to Viet Nam all right.

.....

“I can’t write I’m sorry. I hope family happy.

“Sister small housegirl yours formerly,

“Zhink thi Zhank.”

How did Zhink thi Zhank meet Jacobi?

What does this letter say about the relationship between Zhink thi Zhank and Jacobi?

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DBQ

Document E:

Ron Ridenhour, a former GI wrote to his congressman, after hearing stories of a terrible massacre from his fellow soldiers. The incident he describes is known as the My Lai Massacre where more than 400 Vietnamese civilians were murdered on March 16, 1968.

“When “Butch” told me this I didn’t quite believe that what he was telling me was true, but he assured me that it was and went on to describe what had happened. The other two companies that made up the task force cordoned off the village so that “Charlie” Company could move through to destroy the structures and kill the inhabitants. Any villagers who ran from Charlie Company were stopped by the encircling companies. I asked “Butch” several times if all the people were killed. He said that he thought they were men, women and children. He recalled seeing a small boy, about three or four years old, standing by the trail with a gunshot wound in one arm. The boy was clutching his wounded arm with his other hand, while blood trickled between his fingers. He was staring around himself in shock and disbelief at what he saw. “He just stood there with big eyes staring around like he didn’t understand; he didn’t believe what was happening. Then the captain’s RTO (radio operator) put a burst of 16 (M-16 rifle) fire into him.” It was so bad, Gruver said, that one of the men in his squad shot himself in the foot in order to be medivaced out of the area so that he would not have to participate in the slaughter. Although he had not seen it, Gruver had been told by people he considered trustworthy that one of the company’s officers, 2nd Lieutenant Kally (this spelling may be incorrect) had rounded up several groups of villagers (each group consisting of a minimum of 20 persons of both sexes and all ages). According to the story, Kally then machine-gunned each group. Gruver estimated that the population of the village had been 300 to 400 people and that very few, if any, escaped.”

What happened at My Lai?

How might events like this impact civilian attitudes?

How might this affect American public opinion?

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DBQ

DOC D



Document F

The following is an excerpt a 1968 letter written home by an American soldier to his family.

“We handed out food and supplies to the villagers today. Some smiled and thanked us, but others just stared. It’s hard to tell who is friendly and who might be helping the enemy.”

The photograph is just one depiction of U.S. troops offering food to South Vietnamese citizens.



Philip Jones Griffiths—Magnum Photos-TIME MAGAZINE

What action is the soldier describing? What action is the soldier doing in the photograph?

How are the people’s response different in the letter than in the photograph?

What concern does the soldier express in the letter?

What do you think the soldier is feeling in the photograph?

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DOCUMENT ANALYSIS ORGANIZER



DIRECTIONS: After analyzing the documents and answering the questions, use the graphic organizer below to organize the primary sources for the DBQ essay.

DOCUMENT	POSITIVE INTERACTION	NEGATIVE INTERACTION	KEY EVIDENCE
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			

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ESSAY TIPS AND DIRECTIONS



DIRECTIONS:

DBQ QUESTION: To what extent were relationships between American soldiers and South Vietnamese civilians positive or negative during the Vietnam War?

You will write a well-organized essay that includes the following:

- A clear thesis
- Evidence from at least 3 documents
- Analysis of both positive and negative relationships
- At least one piece of outside knowledge

SAMPLE PARAGRAPH STARTERS:

- The relationship between American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians was complex because...
- One example of a positive interaction is...
- However, a negative interaction occurred when...
- This shows that...
- Overall, the relationship was mostly... because...