THE VIETNAM WAR
THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM
A. THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM

1. The French had controlled the region of Southeast Asia known as French Indochina until the Nazis occupied France in 1940. Germany allowed Japan to set up military bases throughout Indochina which weakened France’s control over Vietnam. Taking advantage of France’s weakened control the Vietnamese people began to revolt.
B. **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VIET MINH**

1. In 1941 Vietnamese nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh declared to overthrow French rule. Ho downplayed the movement’s communist ideology and appealed to the Vietnamese people’s patriotism and hatred of the French.
C. VIETNAM DECLARES INDEPENDENCE

1. Ho Chi Minh’s influence and popularity was enormous and declared independence on August 25, 1945.

2. Minh quoted from the American Declaration of Independence and compared his nation’s troubles with France to America’s struggle against the British Empire. War broke out between the Viet Minh and France.
D. **US SUPPORT FOR FRANCE IN VIETNAM**

1. Ho Chi Minh hoped that the US would support the Viet Minh. Harry S Truman was concerned with stopping the spread of communism and limiting the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Therefore Truman ignored Ho’s request that the US recognize the Viet Minh Communist government.
D. 2. In 1949 Mao Zedong led a communist Revolution in China and in 1950 communist North Korea invaded South Korea. At the same time the Soviet Union recognized Ho’s communist regime the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

3. As a result the U.S. fought the Korean War and offered to France financial aid in their struggle with the communist Vietnamese.
THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM

E. FRENCH DEFEAT IN VIETNAM

1. The Viet Minh army finally defeated the French at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In May 1954 delegates from world nations met in Geneva Switzerland to resolve the war in Indochina.

2. In the document Geneva Accords, the French agreed to leave Vietnam and the country would temporarily be divided into two regions: North and South Vietnam. The Accords stated that Vietnam would be reunited within two years via a national election.

3. The elections were never held and fighting continued between North and South Vietnam throughout the 1950s.
U.S. INTERVENTION IN VIETNAM BEGINS
U.S. INTERVENTION IN VIETNAM BEGINS
A. EISENHOWER’S DOMINO THEORY

1. Eisenhower was dedicated to halting the spread of communism in Asia. Eisenhower equated Vietnam and the rest of Indochina to a row of dominoes: if Vietnam fell to the Communists, the rest of Indochina would quickly follow suit.

2. Eisenhower’s “domino theory” became the basis for American intervention in the conflicts of Vietnam.
B. **U.S. Support of South Vietnam**

1. In 1954 Diem was the leader of South Vietnam but his rule was becoming undemocratic.

2. Nevertheless when Diem asked for American aid in 1961 to combat the communism in the north, the current president, JFK agreed to help the South Vietnamese.
3. After the Geneva Accords in 1954 the U.S. support Diem but his rule was becoming more undemocratic and so JFK and his military advisor planned a coupe.

4. Kennedy and his advisors had military generals assassinate Diem on November 1, 1963. President Kennedy was assassinated three weeks later.
US PRESENCE ESCALATES IN VIETNAM
A. JOHNSON’S APPROACH TO VIETNAM

1. When Johnson became president his advisors pressured him to increase military aid to South Vietnamese government. Johnson’s opinion was: “. . . it is the biggest mess I’ve ever seen. I don’t think it’s worth fighting for and I don’t think we can get out”.

2. Despite Johnson’ private doubts he felt pressure to increase U.S. military support. He also was afraid that if he appeared “soft” on communism he would not be reelected in 1964.
B. **THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT**

1. In the summer of 1964 the U.S. conducted intelligence missions in the Gulf of Tonkin. The aim was to determine the extent of the North Vietnam’s defenses which were being supported by the Soviet Union.

2. On August 2, 1964 the USS Maddox clashed with communist patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. vessel refused to retreat claiming the U.S. had legitimate rights in international waters. President Johnson justified the American assault by arguing that the Vietnamese attack was unprovoked. In turn North Vietnam responded that it was chasing attackers from its territorial waters.
U.S. PRESENCE ESCALATES IN VIETNAM

C. THE GULF OF TONKIN RESOLUTION

1. The U.S. fired on the Gulf of Tonkin again on August 3rd believing that Vietnamese boats were planning a second attack. Johnson seized this opportunity to send a pre-planned resolution to Congress.

2. The resolution gave the president the right to “take all necessary measures” to defend any nation in SE Asia threatened by Communist aggression. The resolution passed through Congress. The document gave Johnson the legal right to send troops into Vietnam.
D. **JOHNSON ESCALATES THE WAR.**

1. In 1965 Johnson sent order for the US to conduct air raids on North Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Bombing began on a regular basis. Later that year the first American combat troops arrived in South Vietnam. By December 1965 nearly 200,000 troops were stationed and in 1966 Johnson sent another 200,000. By the end of 1967 500,000 troops were on active duty in South Vietnam.
HARDSHIP AND DISILLUSIONMENT ON THE WAR FRONT
A. Guerilla Warfare

1. The fighting in Vietnam was unlike anything US troops had previously experience. First Vietnam's wet, dense terrain made movement difficult.

2. The Viet Cong troops used guerrilla tactics to attack US forces. For example they so heavily and fighting engaged the US troops that calling in for air and artillery strikes would have put the US troops at danger.

3. Vietnamese fighters darted out of tunnels and bunkers to ambush US patrols and used land mines and booby traps to kill small platoons.

One soldier recalled the effectives of the Viet Cong: The VC set off 10 mines. When they all went off at once every man in the patrol was hit. . . The corpsman who was behind me was killed instantly. The squad leader right in front of me lost both his legs from the knees on down. . . I have never been so damned scared in my life.”
B. **Effective Vietnamese Forces**

1. Despite the dangers of fighting a guerrilla war in the jungles of a nation half a world away, the US government was confident that it could defeat the Vietnamese with a superior show of military force.

2. The Viet Cong preferred hit-and-run maneuvers so they could choose the terrain for battle and avoid direct confrontations. Furthermore the Vietnamese were familiar with the terrain which gave them the advantage. Vietnamese soldiers were so well disciplined and effective that US officers commented “I wish they were on our side”.
C. DISTINGUISHING FRIENDS FROM ENEMIES

1. Another difficulty US troops faced in the Vietnam War was attempting to distinguish “friends” from enemies. In South Vietnam soldiers could not always differentiate between hostile and friendly peasants. In fact many south Vietnamese did not welcome the presence of the US troops.

2. A Marine captain stated: “You interviewed everyone. Here’s a woman of 22, pregnant and she tells an interrogator that her husband isn’t Viet Cong. But she watches your men walk down a trail and get killed or wounded in a booby trap. She knows the booby trap is there, but she doesn’t warn them. . The enemy was all around you”.
D. GROWING US DISILLUSIONMENT

1. In the beginning of the war many US soldiers believed they were fighting for a good cause: to halt the spread of communism and win the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people toward democracy.

2. However morale began to decline as the war progressed. One soldier wrote: “Vietnam is no gain that I can see. We’re fighting, dying, for a people who resent our being over here. . . . I guess I’m bitter now, Dad. This war is all wrong.”
HARSHIP AND DISILLUSIONMENT
ON THE WAR FRONT

1966 Folk song by General Lansdale.

Listen to the song and answer the following questions:

1. What were some of the more difficult aspects of fighting in Vietnam?
2. What does the song writer who is a soldier refer to South Vietnam as “charlie’s land”?
3. How do you think his perspective affected his desire to fight in the war?
4. How might his perspective have affected other soldiers?
VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM AND DETERMINATION
A. THE VIETNAMESE “PEOPLE’S WAR”

1. The Vietnamese communists called the war a “people’s war” and received support in both North and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh appealed to the people’s national identify. This feeling was instilled into every schoolboy and they were “willing to do anything to save the people of south Vietnam” from the enemy.
B. COMMUNIST SACRIFICES

1. The communists made horrendous sacrifices in lives to attain their objectives. At least 1/2 million of their troops died in action, yet there were always new recruits to replace the fallen. Minh had declared that they would fight five years or even ten to twenty years. As a result US bombings did little to halt the Vietnamese forces. US troops would conquer territory by launching massive air assaults only to have the Viet Cong sneak back in after the bombings.
C. THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL

1. One important advantage Ho had over the US was the use of a series of complex paths and roads known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The trail ran from North to South Vietnam through Cambodia and Laos. Virtually undetectable from the air due to the dense jungle the trail was a key means of transporting military equipment and troops from North Vietnam.

2. US forces could not attack the Vietcong in neutral Cambodia and Laos. As a result the US attempted to bomb Viet Cong forces traveling on the trail but the air raids were unsuccessful. Therefore, Ho’s troops were able to bypass US forces and enter South Vietnam in relative safety.
D. THE PLIGHT OF VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS

1. The fighting in Vietnam had a devastating impact on the country's civilians and pristine countryside. In the north 80% of the people killed were civilians. In the South, General Westmoreland's strategy to wipe out villages in a vain attempt to prevent the Viet Cong from seizing territory was useless. Air raids destroyed entire villages and laid waste to surrounding landscapes.

2. Nine percent of the bombs the US dropped were napalm bombs. The bombs contained a jellylike chemical mixture that burned whatever it touched. One villager recalled a horrifying scene: “It was awful. Hundreds of people were dead and many others were burned terribly but still alive. Some children were burned and were screaming and crying for their mothers. I saw one small child’s body in a bunker that was still glowing. The body looked like a blackened pig. I was so scared I couldn’t move”. As word of such bombings reached the US it only added to the increasing unpopularity.
1. You will create a drawing of an American soldier on one half of your paper.

2. On the other half of your paper you will create a drawing of a Vietnamese civilian.

3. For each drawing you will write five statements about the war that express what each figure is seeing, hearing, saying, feeling and doing.

4. One of your statements must express what the character thinks about the war or their experiences.
AMERICAN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE WAR WANES
A. ANTIWAR DEMONSTRATIONS AT HOME

1. The images of napalm victims in Vietnam enforced the antiwar sentiment in the US. When US bombing of Vietnam began so did American protest demonstrations. College students held sit-ins. The first major war protest occurred on April 17, 1965 with over 20,000 people marching on Washington, DC.

2. During demonstrations, protesters carried signs expressing: “War is a dirty word”, “Peace”, “Hey, Hey, LBJ how many kids did you kill today?” by the end of 1967 war demonstrations were a daily occurrence at colleges around the nation.
AMERICAN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE WAR WANES

B. UNPOPULARITY OF THE WAR.
1. With Johnson sending more and more troops the number of casualties increased.
2. Unlike WWII where Americans believed they were fighting against clearly evil enemies, many Americans were uncertain as to who the enemy was and why the US was involved in Vietnam.
3. Americans found it hard to understand why American lives were being lost in another country’s civil war.
4. Horrifying images of war appeared in magazines, newspapers and TV.
C. **RESISTANCE TO THE DRAFT**

1. In 1966 the rising casualties in Vietnam and the increasingly questionable war aims of the US government led to a widespread resistance to the draft.

2. In public demonstrations, young men illegally burned or tore up their draft cards. Other men refused to register for the draft or registered as conscientious objectors. 15 Million men applies for and received draft deferments. Over ½ a million men went into hiding or fled the country to avoid the draft.
D. US LEADERS SPEAK OUT

1. As the war dragged on leaders began to come forward publicly condemn the war in Vietnam. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1967 “Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. . . “
1. On one half of your paper you will create a visual or symbol and a catchy slogan against or for the Vietnam War.

2. On the other half of your paper you will write three arguments against or for the Vietnam War that you would present at a war-protest rally.

3. On the back of your paper create a Venn Diagram that shows a comparison between the Vietnam War and the War in Iraq.
FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE
A. THE WAR REACHES ITS HEIGHT

1. By 1968 Vietnam had been raging for over 4 years with no end in sight. The US government assure the public that fighting would soon wind down. This assurance became less and less credible as American casualties rose.

2. From 1968-1969 500,000 American troops were stationed in Vietnam. The US dropped 1.2 million tons of bombs in 400,000 air attacks, destroyed over 20,000 acres of vegetation, over ½ million people became refugees, and 130,000 Vietnamese civilians perished per month.
B. THE TET OFFENSIVE

1. In 1967 CIA agents came across a document that claimed the communists were planning an offensive. US officials dismissed the document believing it to be propaganda. In January 1968 the US and Vietnam agreed to temporary truce during the celebration of Tet (was the Vietnamese New Year).

2. But on January 31, 1968 70,000 communist soldiers launched a surprise offensive of extraordinary intensity on South Vietnam. They surged into more than a hundred cities and towns including the capital of Saigon.

3. The attack shifted the war for the first time from a rural setting to an impregnable urban war.
4. Despite the element of surprise the Tt offensive was a military defeat for the Viet Cong. My the end of March 1968 2,000 American GIs had died compared to over 50,000 communist troops. But the communist willingness to endure war casualties continued.
C. THE COST OF THE WAR

1. The combination of the Tet offensive, rising casualties and the increasing cost of the war many Americans questioned further involvement in Vietnam. A majority of Americans considered Johnson’ stand in Vietnam a mistake.

2. By 1967 Johnson had to cut $6 billion from the domestic budget and impose an additional 10% tax surcharge on American goods.
E. JOHN L. LEAVES OFFICE

1. By 1968 Johnson had three choices: he could escalate the war with more troops; he could continue on the present course; or he could curb the air raids and withdraw US troops from Vietnam. Johnson decided not to increase US troops.

2. In a speech on March 31, 1968 Johnson announced that he US would decrease bombings and was open to negotiating with the North Vietnamese government. He also let the people know: “I shall not seek and I will not accept the nomination of my party for another term as your president”.
VIOLENCE ESCALATES AT HOME
AN ABROAD
A. THE 1968 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. Robert Kennedy was running for president and campaigned against the war. He was assassinated on June 5, 1968. MLK had previously been assassinated in April.

2. The democratic delegates nominated Hubert Humphrey who plan for Vietnam was similar to President Johnson's. The Republicans nominated Richard Nixon who promised to “end the war and win the peace, which won him the presidency in 1968.
VIOLENCE ESCALATES AT HOME AND ABROAD

B. THE MY LAI MASSACRE

1. Public outrage over the war in Vietnam continued in Nixon's first years especially after a journalist revealed that US forces had massacred the village of My Lai in 1968.

2. Thirty US soldiers under the direction of Lt Calley stormed My Lai and fired on the defenseless villagers killing over 200 women, children and old men. Calley was eventually court-martialed for the murders of the villagers.
VIOLENCE ESCALATES AT HOME AND ABROAD

C. **NIXON’S POLICY OF “PEACE WITH HONOR”**

1. Nixon did not want to be the first President to lose a war. He implemented the “Vietnamization” of the war, which involved pulling US combat troops out of Vietnam and transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese government.

2. Henry Kissinger, national security advisor, proceeded with peace talks with the North Vietnamese government.
VIOLENCE ESCALATES AT HOME AND ABROAD

D. US BOMBINGS IN CAMBODIA

1. In March 1969 Nixon approved a plan to secretly bomb Vietnamese communist enclaves in neutral Cambodia. The US dropped over 100,000 tons of explosives on Cambodia and then denied the illegal bombings.

2. Lon Nol kicked the communists out of Cambodia with US support. On April 30 1969 Nixon announced that the US had invaded Cambodia after promising only 10 days earlier that he would withdraw 150,000 US troops from SE Asia.
VIOLENCE ESCALATES AT HOME AND ABROAD

E. ESCALATING PROTESTS AND KENT STATE SHOOTINGS

1. The US invasion of Cambodia was met with an outpouring of protests that rivaled the nation’s response to the Tet offensive two years earlier.

2. College students held protests around the country some of them tragically ending in violence. At Jackson State University in Mississippi, police killed 2 students and wounded none others. After students at Ohio’s Kent state University burnt down the campus’s ROTC building, Ohio governor James Rhodes claimed they were “worse than the Nazis” and vowed to kicked them off the campus.

3. On May 4, 1970 Ohio National Guardsmen at Kent State opened fire on antiwar demonstrators and killed 4 students. The killings outraged the public and caused an additional wave of student strikes and protests around the country.

4. By the end of May students at over 400 college campuses had brought classes to a halt. The Nixon administrations’ initial response to the Kent state murders only made things worse: Press Secretary Ron Ziegler stated that the students’ deaths were evidence that when dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy. In the one and half years since Nixon had taken office the situation aboard and at home seemed to have worsened.
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THE U.S. PULLS OUT AND THE VIETNAM WAR ENDS
A. PEACE TALKS FALTER

1. By the time US troops left Cambodia in June 1970, the war had spread to Laos. Meanwhile, peace talks between the US and North Vietnam in Paris were faltering due in part to Ho Chi Minh’s death in 1969.

2. Public peace talks involved the US, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. Secret peace talks were also being conducted by national Security advisor Kissinger. Neither the public nor the private negotiations resulted in a quick “peace with honor”.
B. **CEASE-FIRE DECLARED.**


2. The Paris Agreement was controversial in that it allowed the North Vietnam to maintain its 150,000 troops in South Vietnam while the South Vietnam leader Thieu remained in power.
THE US PULLS OUT AND THE VIETNAM WAR ENDS

C. **US FORCES LEAVE VIETNAM**

1. On March 29, 1973, the last US troops left the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon. The US also stopped bombing in Laos. Finally, in August 1973, Nixon stopped the bombing of Cambodia. The US war in Vietnam had officially ended.
D. FIGHTING RESUMES IN VIETNAM

1. Both North and South Vietnam soon violated the Paris Agreement and resumed fighting. While the US did not get reenvolved it supported the South Vietnam government with billions of dollars in aid. Nevertheless, South Vietnam crumbled as the North Vietnamese launched attack after attack during 1974.

1. Panicked Americans and Vietnamese rushed to the US embassy in Saigon in an attempt to escape before the final communist assault.

2. One American recalled “Crowds of people positioned themselves on the embassy roof, straining to reach the helicopters hovering just above their heads. On April 30 South Vietnam surrendered. The Vietnam War was over.
E. **THE EFFECTS OF THE VIETNAM WAR**

1. The human cost of war in Vietnam was staggering. Three million Americans served of which 58,000 died, 303,000 were wounded and over 750 taken prisoner. More than 4 million Vietnamese solders and civilians on both sides were killed or wounded.

2. The war cost the US more than $120 billion and was the longest war the country ever fought.
3. Tens of thousands Vietnam veterans suffered a range of disorders from depression to drug addictions. Some veterans experienced terrible side effects such as cancer and sterility from Agent Orange, a highly toxic herbicide used during chemical warfare in Vietnam.

4. Vietnam syndrome – The war had a profound effect on how Americans viewed themselves. Vietnam has created doubts about American judgment, about American credibility, about American power at home and throughout the world. The US is now leery of entering into any situation that would replicate the events of the Vietnam War.
OVERVIEW OF THE VIETNAM WAR
A. **VIETNAM: A PAINFUL WAR**

1. Us involvement in the conflicts of Vietnam lasted from the mid 1940s to 1975. The Vietnam War was the longest war in American history and the only war the US lost.

2. During WWII most Americans felt deeply proud of their participation in the war. But in Vietnam it tested the American citizens limits: the limit of their country's power, of their country's government, and of their country’s “exceptionalism”. The painful memories of Vietnam have shaped US foreign policy for the future.
OVERVIEW OF THE VIETNAM WAR

B. US PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR
1. According to the US government the US entered the war to prevent communism from spreading.
2. Over the course of the war the US supported the South Vietnamese against the communists.
C. **THE COSTS OF THE WAR**

1. Over 58,000 Americans and 4 million Vietnamese were killed in the war.

2. In 1982 the US government unveiled a monument that honored those Americans who had died in the war. Located in DC the Vietnam War Memorial is made of polished black granite and engraved with the names of all those Americans who fell in Vietnam.
3. One mother wrote in a letter to her dead son, “I came to this black wall again to see and touch your name”

4. The Vietnam War had complex origins, lessons disputed, its legacy still to be assessed by future generations, a misguided endeavor, but most of all a tragedy of epic dimensions.
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Choose one of the scenarios below and answer the questions:

1. **Vietnam War Veteran visiting the Vietnam War Memorial:**
   a. Why are you here?
   b. What do you think of the monument?
   c. How did the war affect you personally?
   d. What lessons might we learn from the Vietnam War?

2. **An Anti-Vietnam War protester who is visiting the Vietnam War Memorial:**
   a. Why are you here?
   b. What do you think of the monument?
   c. How did the war affect you personally?
   d. What lessons might we learn from the Vietnam War?

3. **A Vietnamese immigrant to the U.S. who is visiting the Vietnam War Memorial:**
   a. Why are you here?
   b. What do you think of the monument?
   c. How did the war affect you personally?
   d. What lessons might we learn from the Vietnam War?
Create a graphic organizer with the words “Vietnam War” in the middle.

Connect the following to the middle: Reasons for U.S. involvement, Types of Warfare, Soldiers, Protests Against the War, Legacies of the War.

Record what you remember about each category.