

COMPARING THE WARS: Korea, Vietnam and the U.S. in the Cold War

Center for East Asian Studies – Korean War Teaching Initiative

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ABOUT THIS LESSON

Using the materials provided, texts, and research materials, students will compare and contrast the Korean and Vietnam Wars – considering U.S. involvements and the changes and continuities of the Cold War during these periods in history.

GRADE LEVEL

Geared toward U.S. History course work – my school situation references grade 11

Depending on instructor decision of what materials to provide and what materials students will research – this might be an activity for AP students with a bit more student driven work.

CLASSROOM TIME

Approximately 2 or 3 class periods depending on materials supplied to students and/or their efforts on research for primary documents

RESOURCES

Korean War Teaching Initiative materials

The Korean War 101: Causes, Course, and Conclusion of the Conflict

Korea: The Never Ending War (PBS)

The Korean War: Curriculum Guide for the 2020 East Asia in the Upper Midwest Teaching Initiative

Variety of Available Primary and Secondary Source Resources

Example - Library of Congress

BACKGROUND

WWI and WWII were wars that were U.S. success stories. The Korean Conflict was a very different experience (as was the Vietnam War) and since that time our entanglements have had far more lasting and reaching effects that still draw our attention today. Examples of current North Korean, South Korean and U.S. relations and as an extension our reasons for stepping on Middle East sands.

Why does the U.S. get involved in some conflicts and not others. To that point, why was the U.S. more “successful” with their efforts of Cold War containment in post WWII Europe than Asia? How did the U.S. efforts change over time and experience? What were our motivations and how did they change?

This lesson is set with a general background of the Cold War and the Korean Conflict knowledge. From there, students will use materials to evaluate the context of the Cold War and how U.S. involvement stayed

consistent or changed as the Cold War escalated and then ended. Extensions of an “Asian War” focus can be pursued to our fighting and participation in more recent Middle Eastern conflicts.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze primary and secondary documents
- Study 1950s perspective on entering foreign conflict and expected outcomes and apply lessons learned on our actions in the Vietnam War and beyond
- Consider continuity and change of U.S. foreign policy and military actions
- Compare and contrast wartime experiences of Americans and the American society

STANDARDS

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Social Studies (Grade 12 benchmarks)

Inq2.a: Gather diverse sources (electronic, digital, print, and other mass media) applicable to the inquiry.

SSIInq2.a.h – Explore evidence discovered through personal research through a variety of disciplinary lenses (e.g., economics, history, political science) and multiple perspectives (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income) with a variety of sources including primary and secondary sources and media resources.

SS.Hist1: Wisconsin students will use historical evidence for determining cause and effect.

SS.Hist2: Wisconsin students will analyze, recognize, and evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time and contextualization of historical events.

SS.Hist3: Wisconsin students will connect past events, people, and ideas to the present; use different perspectives to draw conclusions; and suggest current implications.

SS.Hist4: Wisconsin students will evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to interpret the historical context, intended audience, purpose, or author’s point of view (historical methodology)

LESSON

This lesson is made to be done as a U.S. History class chronologically approaches the start of the Vietnam War.

Before jumping into discussion of the status of Vietnam and the U.S., the teacher should review steps the U.S. took as they entered into the Korean War. Together with students, there should be research done to see the U.S. motive and mood. This can be completed through text basics and then become more specific with usage of newspaper reports, government and military documentation, and personal histories. While reviewing the previously stated materials, specific factual information on the process should also be highlighted. What is the relationship between the U.S. perspectives and the U.S. movement?

After revisiting Korean Conflict information, the U.S. steps toward engagement should be studied... in the same manner... perspective and fact.

I recommend a timeline activity to plot out specific events that bring all combatants together.

In order to take the temperature of the Cold War at both times, news articles or newsreels and personal writings can be studied.

After collecting information from both settings, students can discuss and debate similarities and differences as well as continuities and changes between the two settings. With the information they summarize from those discussions they can work to answer questions like

What lessons were (or were not learned) from our experiences in the Korean Conflict?

What lessons were ignored as we entered in to the Vietnam War?

What similarities/differences can be evaluated between U.S./Asian aggressions and U.S./European efforts?

How did the Cold War temperature change as the years went on from the 1950s to the 1970s and how did it effect our relationships in Asia?

Based on this information, can correlations be made between U.S. and Middle Eastern military involvements in recent years? Can correlations be made with U.S./Asian relations (North and South Korea, China, Vietnam)?

Finish with any variety of post lesson activities.

POST LESSON ACTIVITIES

Continue the work of comparing and contrasting by moving forward in time to extend comparisons between Asian and Middle Eastern conflicts.

Continue to “chart” U.S. efforts in wars beyond those of the 50’s and 60’s. Compare with Afghanistan, Persian Gulf, and current U.S. involvements.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Summative Exam

with a variety of questions – multiple choice, short answer, etc.

Question focus on context, compare and contrast, and change and continuity

Essay Writing

Students can be challenged to write a three-paragraph essay that evaluates the causes and consequences of both wars and asks students to rank importance (perhaps linked to the period).

Students can be challenged to write a three-paragraph essay that evaluates the change or continuity of U.S. foreign policy during the early and mid-stages of the Cold War.

Speech/Presentation

Students can create a speech or multi-media presentation that argues for or against U.S. interventions in Vietnam (or beyond), based on Korean Conflict research of involvement motivation. (Lessons learned or not)