

LESSON | American Prisoners of War in Vietnam: Courage, Resistance, and the Human Cost of War

GUIDING QUESTIONS | How did American prisoners of war demonstrate resistance and resilience during the Vietnam conflict, and what can experiences teach us about character, sacrifice, and the human cost of war?

STANDARDS & SKILLS *This lesson is aligned with Tennessee State Standards and learning objectives; however, this lesson can be adapted to meet standards in other states.*

Social Studies (11th Grade)

US.66 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War, including: • Geneva Accords • Ho Chi Minh • Gulf of Tonkin Resolution • Vietnamization

Literacy

11-12.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.

11-12.RI.KID.2 Determine multiple central ideas of a text or texts and analyze their development; provide a critical summary.

11-12.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author's choices regarding the ordering of ideas and events, the introduction and development of ideas, and connections among ideas impact meaning.

11-12.RI.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

11-12.RI.CS.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her own exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

11-12.RI.CS.6 Determine an author's point of view and/or purpose in a text, analyzing how style and content contribute to its effectiveness.

11-12.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in multiple diverse formats and media.

11-12.RI.IKI.8 Evaluate how an author incorporates evidence and reasoning to support the argument and specific claims in a text.

11-12.RI.IKI.9 Analyze and evaluate a variety of thematically-related texts of historical and literary significance for their topics, facts, purposes, and rhetorical features.

12.RI.RRTC.10 Read and comprehend a variety of literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11-12 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Skills

SSP.01: Collect data and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

SSP.02: Critically examine a primary or secondary source.

SSP.03: Synthesize data from a variety of sources.

SSP.04: Construct and communicate arguments by citing supporting evidence.

SSP.05: Develop historical awareness.

SSP.06: Develop geographic awareness.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine the causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War, including: Geneva Accords, Ho Chi Minh, Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and Vietnamization. Students will analyze and gather information from a variety of sources.

EXIT TICKET

Having critically examined and summarized causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War, students will use primary and secondary sources to develop an evidence-based argument answering the question: What impact did the escalation of the Vietnam War have on the United States and those who fought in the war?

CLEAR LEARNING TARGETS

- I can use primary and secondary sources to analyze the U.S. involvement in, and the escalation of, the war in Vietnam and the causes, course, and consequences of this action.
- I can determine the characteristics of Vietnam Prisoners of War Medal of Honor Recipients and examine how those values can impact my own life today.
- I can complete a summative RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) written assignment using claim-evidence-reasoning to explain the U.S. involvement in, and the escalation of, the war in Vietnam and the causes, course, and consequences of this action.

MATERIALS NEEDED

In-class Activities

- Butcher/Poster Paper/Construction Paper, 8 x 14 Legal Paper/8x10 Printer Paper, Colored Pencils, Markers, Pencils/Pens, Glue Sticks, Scissors, Notecards/Timer or Clock to manage rotations, something to pick students at random (Popsicle Sticks with names of students), a Bucket or Fishbowl for the socratic seminar.
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ACTIVITIES

- **Activity 1:** The Road to the Vietnam War: Decisions, Resistance, and Consequences: Analyzing primary and secondary sources to build background: What were the Geneva Accords? Who was Ho Chi Minh, and what were his goals? What was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? What were the POW policies of both the United States and North Vietnam and how did these policies impact the war?
- **Activity 2:** Life as a POW and its impact on the war and the homefront. What was life like at the the infamous Hỏa Lò Prison aka "Hanoi Hilton?"
- **Activity 3:** Vietnam Prisoners of War Medal of Honor Recipients' character analysis with a Five "W" summary.
- **Activity 4:** Exit Ticket: Summary RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) Writing Project

CLASS ACTIVITY 1 | The Causes, Course, and Consequences of the Vietnam War: Socratic Seminar

FOCUS: Analyzing Sources Students will analyze primary sources related to the Vietnam War and lead a Socratic seminar based on their findings.

INSTRUCTION

- **Part 1 of the Socratic Seminar:** Give each student a copy of the [Activity 1 Primary and Secondary Sources](#). The different primary and secondary sources have already been divided into 5 parts and are labeled.
- Students will read [Activity 1 Primary and Secondary Sources](#) individually. [The Cease-Fire Agreements in Indochina: Statement by President Eisenhower, July 21, 1954](#), [Excerpt from Ho Chi Minh' Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam](#), [Letter to Harry Truman](#) [President Johnson's Message to Congress August 5, 1964 on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident](#), [The United States POW Code of Conduct](#), and [Two Pilots' First Hand Recount an Early POW Interrogation](#) and [Politburo Resolution 20 November 1969](#).
- Students will complete a [Source Reflection Chart \(Activity 1, Handout 2\)](#).
- As students complete the Source Reflection Chart, hand them two note cards (or post it notes). Have them write down two questions they made from the chart and have them drop the questions in a "question bucket."
- **Part 2 of the Socratic Seminar:** When the class has completed the readings, set up your classroom to have a Socratic Discussion. Move desks to create an inner circle, and move desks to an outer circle.
- Divide the class into groups that will sit at the inner circle and outer circle. The inner circle will have a discussion for 15–20 mins using text evidence. During this time the outer Circle will observe, take notes, and use a [Tracking Sheet \(for claims, counterclaims, use of evidence\) \(Activity 1 Handout 3\)](#). The inner circle and outer circle will switch their seating locations and their roles after 15-20 minutes.
- Start the students with an open-ended, provocative question to kick off the Socratic seminar. The question should tie together the sources, invite multiple perspectives, and prompt deep thinking. I have sample open-ended, provocative questions included in [Socratic Seminar Teacher Script \(Activity 1, Handout 1\)](#).
- Have students in the inner circle pick questions from the "question bucket" to help in the socratic discussion.
- Encourage students to ask follow-up questions, reference the texts, and connect ideas across groups
- Lastly, students will write a post-seminar reflection from prompts that are included in the [Socratic Seminar Teacher Script \(Activity 1, Handout 1\)](#).

NOTES

- This activity is designed for a 90 minute high school block schedule. The lesson is labeled in two parts so that it can be broken up into two classes for a 55 minute class period.
- More about Socratic Seminar Protocol [here](#).

SUGGESTIONS

- Use the [Socratic Seminar Teacher Script \(Activity 1, Handout 1\)](#) to help you through this lesson.
- The Socratic Discussion should be student led. As long as the students are being well behaved and respectful, let them completely facilitate the Socratic Seminar. Be an observer and take notes in case there are any factual errors. At a later time you can help clarify any factual errors that may arise. With that being said, you might want to sneak in a question (or two) you've made yourself to the socratic seminar "question bowl," if you want to make sure a certain question or idea is discussed during the seminar.
- Encourage students to make a variety of questions for the "question bucket" using Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level 1, 2, and 3.
- An optional idea is to designate a specific student to keep track of students who are contributing to the Socratic Seminar (asking relative questions, etc).
- Although part of the lesson has students read primary and secondary sources individually, you may choose to implement paired or small group reading to help support students with varying reading lexile levels.
- Consider using a timer and a fixed deadline to keep students on track.

CLASS ACTIVITY 2 | Life as a POW in the infamous “Hanoi Hilton.” Its impact on the war and the homefront.

FOCUS: Analyzing Sources: Students will work collaboratively in groups to examine firsthand accounts and identify common themes among the experiences of American POWs during the Vietnam War.

INSTRUCTION

- Students will work in small groups (4-6 Students in each group, depending on class size).
- Give each student a copy of [Activity 2, Handout 1](#) response sheet. Although students are in groups, they will individually complete this handout.
- **Preparation (Individual Think - 5–7 minutes):** At each station, you will find a short excerpt from a POW's first-hand account grouped by theme: 1. [Life as a POW: Bailing Out and Being Captured](#) 2. [Life as a POW: Surviving Captivity](#) 3. [Life as a POW: Communicating in Solitary Confinement](#) 4. [Life as a POW: Improved Treatment](#) 5. [Life as a POW: The Voices of Families](#).
- At each station the theme will also have a guiding question.
- At each station the student groups will read the excerpt carefully, think about the guiding question provided, and write a short (2–3 sentence) personal reflection or answer to the question on your response sheet.
- **Carousel Rotation (Pairs - 5 minutes per station, 25 Minutes total):** After students' individual response, have them pair up with a partner at a station. They will share their thoughts and discuss the question together. Lastly, they will jot down 1–2 key ideas from their discussion next to their personal response.
- **Class Discussion (Whole Group - 10–15 minutes):** After rotating through all stations, students will come together as a class to debrief: 1. What common themes did you notice across the different POW experiences? 2. What surprised you the most about their experiences? 3. What qualities helped POWs survive such extreme conditions?
- **Extended Thinking (Remaining Class Time):** Select two POWs from the readings whose experiences moved you the most. For each POW, answer the following: 1. Describe the situation they faced (capture, torture, survival, communication, etc.) in your own words. 2. Identify two character values (from Patriotism, Citizenship, Courage, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment) that they demonstrated. 3. Explain how each trait helped them survive or resist during captivity. 4. What can we learn from the POWs about Patriotism, Citizenship, Courage, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment? 5. How might these values still matter in our lives, even if we are not at war?

NOTES

- Encourage students to bring emotional insight as well as historical analysis into their discussions. This isn't just about facts, it's also about empathy, endurance, and ethics.
- Ask the class as a whole if any of the students want to volunteer to share at the beginning of the share portion of the assignment.
- Consider putting popsicle sticks with student names in a cup, or another way to choose students at random to optimize class participation.
- Think, Pair, Share is a way to encourage active participation and critical thinking. It is particularly useful for promoting deeper conversations and supporting quieter students.
- The primary sources for this activity came from a PBS transcript from the documentary: “Return with Honor.” This documentary is a valuable source, but contains content some viewers might find troubling.

SUGGESTIONS

- Consider using a timer and a fixed deadline to keep students on track.
- While students are currently grouped through random selection, don't hesitate to be intentional with grouping, especially to ensure that students who may need additional support are paired in ways that help them succeed.
- One goal is to have class time at the end of this assignment to set up for a brief preview of the next activity.

CLASS ACTIVITY 3 | Vietnam Prisoners of War Medal of Honor Recipients' Character Analysis with a Five W Summary

FOCUS: Analyzing Sources to Determine Character Values : Students will work collaboratively to explore the stories of five Vietnam War Prisoners of War who received the Medal of Honor for resisting their captors. Using primary and secondary sources, students will examine each individual's acts of valor and reflect on how these courageous actions can inspire themselves and others today.

INSTRUCTION

- Make a set of reading packets using the [Medal of Honor Citations and Summaries](#) Admiral James Bond Stockdale's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary](#) ([Additional Source 1](#)) ([Additional Source 2](#)) ([Additional Source 3](#)) , Colonel George "Bud" Day's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary](#) ([Additional Source 1](#)) ([Additional Source 2](#)) , Colonel Donald G. Cook's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary](#) ([Additional Source](#)) , Captain Lance P. Sijan's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary](#) [Video Source](#) ([Additional Source 1](#)) ([Additional Source 2](#)) , Captain Humbert "Rocky" Versace's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary](#) ([Additional Source](#))
- [Activity 3 Handout 1](#).
- Students will be broken up into groups of at least five students.
- Give the students the reading packet and have them select which Medal of Honor Recipients they will read for their group.
- Students will take turns in their groups, reading each individual Medal of Honor citation aloud.
- When the students have completed the reading of the assignment, hand them the [Activity 3 Handout 1](#).
- Students will work independently to answer the questions on the [Activity 3 Handout 1](#).
- While working on this handout, students will summarize the five Medal of Honor Recipients, describing the five "W's," the who, what, when, where, and why of what they've just read. There are also additional extended thinking questions.
- After the students complete [Activity 3 Handout 1](#), the class will have a brief discussion on each of the Recipients' actions, and the extended thinking questions on the hand out. .
- The goal of this assignment is to connect the actions of these Medal of Honor Recipients to previous parts of this lesson and to prepare the students for the Exit Activity project.

NOTES

- When it comes time for students to discuss this handout, first ask if any of the students want to share their answers, then choose students at random to share their answers.

SUGGESTIONS

- Reading groups of five are suggested, but paired reading groups work as well,
- Don't hesitate to be intentional with grouping as a way to assist students who might need additional support.
- Consider starting the activity by reading the first part out loud while the students follow along. This method has successfully assisted students get started on the reading portion of this activity.
- Students should look for descriptions of the individual's behavior during specific situations and take note of the Medal of Honor character values they demonstrated.

CLASS ACTIVITY 4 | EXIT TICKET: RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) Writing Project.

FOCUS: Summary Independently, students will complete a writing-intensive summative project by selecting a Role, Audience, Format, and Topic (RAFT) that brings to life the experiences of Medal of Honor Recipients during the Vietnam War.

INSTRUCTION

- Quickly recap the already completed activities from this lesson.
- Pass out the RAFT Project instructions and brainstorming handout ([Activity 4 Handout 1](#)).
- Display and distribute the [Exit RAFT Project Rubric Handout](#). Explain to the students that this rubric will be used to grade their project.
- Make sure students have their previous completed work from this lesson, as they will use these to previous assignments to construct their RAFT Project.
- All students should have a packet of the Medal of Honor Recipients' citations and summaries from Activity 3: Admiral James Bond Stockdale's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary \(Additional Source 1\)](#) ([Additional Source 2](#)) ([Additional Source 3](#)), Colonel George "Bud" Day's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary \(Additional Source 1\)](#) ([Additional Source 2](#)), Colonel Donald G. Cook's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary \(Additional Source\)](#), Captain Lance P. Sijan's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary Video Source \(Additional Source 1\)](#) ([Additional Source 2](#)), Captain Humbert "Rocky" Versace's [Medal of Honor Citation](#) and [Brief Summary \(Additional Source\)](#).
- Make sure that there are plenty of copies of the primary and secondary sources from [Activity 1](#) and [Activity 2](#) readings available for the class, as students might want to use them while constructing their RAFT Project.
- The students will work independently on this assignment. They will review their previous work and source material
- After reviewing their resources, students will select a Role, Audience, Topic, and Format from their instructions and fill out the RAFT Brainstorming document from [Activity 4 Handout 1](#).
- Students will construct a RAFT project using their supporting sources, notes, and previous assignments.
- Give the students an opportunity to use the [Exit RAFT Project Rubric Handout](#) to self evaluate their project.
- Instruct the students to attach the grading rubric to the front of their completed project.
- Students will make a creative and informative project that is historically accurate and shows an understanding of the Vietnam War and the POW Experiences.

NOTES

- Remind students that they may use any supporting sources, notes, and previous assignments to help construct this project.
- Walk around the room, ask students about what Role, Audience, Format, and Topic they have chosen. Encourage students to be creative with these projects. Ask the students questions and let them ask you questions, as I have found this encourages meaningful conversations over the subject, as the students are working. Consider questions which emphasize the state of life in the United States between 1964 and 1973. This helps students use higher order thinking skills, as they work to complete their assignment.
- As long as students are staying on task, let them facilitate discussions with each other while working on this project. This helps students to use higher order thinking skills as they complete their tasks.

SUGGESTIONS

- Consider a set of performance deadlines for this project so that students use their time wisely and stay on track.
- If students need additional time, after performance deadlines have passed, allow them to finish the project for homework.

HANDOUT | Activity 1 Source 1: The Fall of French Indochina and the Geneva Accords 1954 Summary and Document Excerpt

Summary: *In July 1954, the Geneva Accords temporarily divided Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. Communists led by Ho Chi Minh controlled the North, while the South remained under Emperor Bao Dai. Elections were scheduled for 1956 to reunite the country. However, South Vietnam and the U.S. refused to sign, fearing Ho Chi Minh would easily win. With U.S. support, Ngo Dinh Diem overthrew Bao Dai and became President of South Vietnam in 1955. The U.S. then increased military and financial aid, beginning deeper involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, many South Vietnamese still supported Ho Chi Minh. The Viet Cong, communist fighters in the South, began attacking Diem's government. They were supplied by North Vietnam through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, creating a major challenge for the U.S. and South Vietnam.*

Document Excerpt

The Fall of French Indochina and the Geneva Accords 1954

Indochina - The Cease-Fire Agreements in Indochina: Statement by President Eisenhower, July 21, 1954

I am glad, of course, that agreement has been reached at Geneva to stop the bloodshed in Indochina.

The United States has not been a belligerent in the war. The primary responsibility for the settlement in Indochina rested with those nations which participated in the fighting. Our role at Geneva has been at all times to try to be helpful where desired and to aid France and Cambodia, Laos, and Viet-Nam to obtain a just and honorable settlement which will take into account the needs of the interested people. Accordingly, the United States has not itself been party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference, but it is our hope that it will lead to the establishment of peace consistent with the rights and the needs of the countries concerned. The agreement contains features which we do not like, but a great deal depends on how they work in practice.

The United States is issuing at Geneva a statement to the effect that it is not prepared to join in the Conference declaration, but, as loyal members of the United Nations, we also say that, in compliance with the obligations and principles contained in article 2 of the United Nations Charter, the United States will not use force to disturb the settlement. We also say that any renewal of Communist aggression would be viewed by us as a matter of grave concern.

As evidence of our resolve to assist Cambodia and Laos to play their part, in full independence and sovereignty, in the peaceful community of free nations, we are requesting the agreement of the Governments of Cambodia and Laos to our appointment of an Ambassador or Minister to be resident at their respective capitals (Phnom Penh and Vientiane). We already have a Chief of Mission at Saigon, the capital of Viet-Nam and this Embassy will, of course, be maintained.

The United States is actively pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area.

Source: American Foreign Policy 1950-1955 Basic Documents Volumes I and II Department of State Publication 6446 General Foreign Policy Series 117 Washington, DC : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957 Obtained from Yale Lillian Goldman Law Library
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/incho27.asp#b1

HANDOUT | Activity 1 Source 2: Who was Ho Chi Minh and What was His Impact on the War in Vietnam

Summary: *Ho Chi Minh led the North Vietnamese forces in their fight against French occupation after World War II. A well-traveled and well-educated leader, he strongly believed in a fully independent Vietnam, having witnessed foreign domination by France both before and after the war, as well as by Japan during it. As the United States became involved in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnamese forces, and their southern allies, the Viet Cong, emerged as a formidable adversary to the U.S. The following sources provide insight into Ho Chi Minh's vision for Vietnam.*

Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.

The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states: "All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights."

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united. They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood.

They have fettered public opinion; they have practiced obscurantism against our people.

To weaken our race, they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

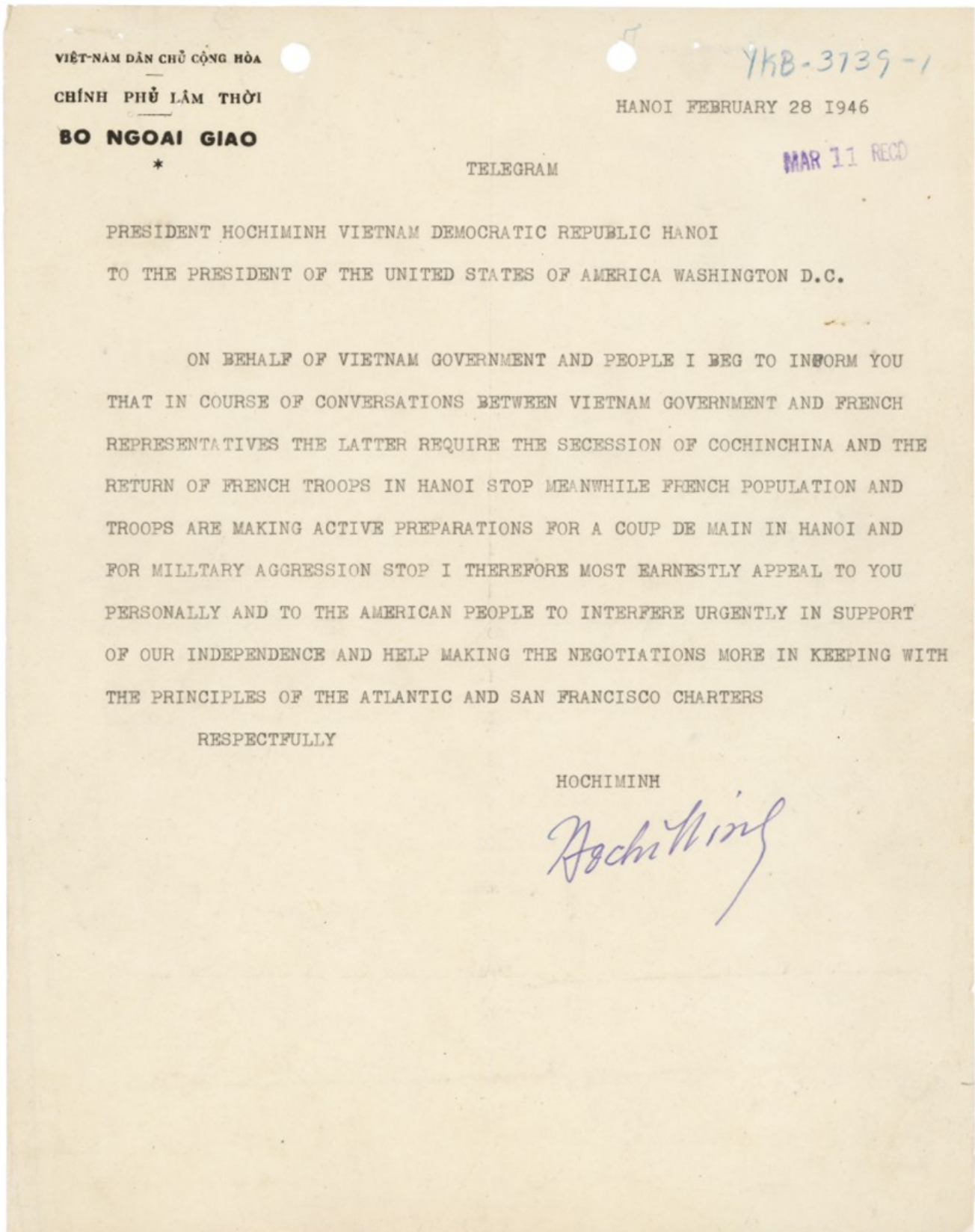
In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people, and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of bank-notes and the export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

They have hampered the prospering of our national bourgeoisie; they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

Source: Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works Vol. 3 from George Mason University History Matters website: <https://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5139/>

Ho Chi Minh's letter to U.S. President Harry Truman, 1946

Source: "Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry S. Truman." National Archives and Records Administration.
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/305263>

HANDOUT | Activity 1 Source 3: President Lyndon Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Speech

Summary: *In early August 1964, two U.S. Navy destroyers, the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy, stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin to support the South Vietnamese military, were allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats. This incident prompted Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, granting President Lyndon B. Johnson the authority to take military action against North Vietnam. The resolution became the foundation for the United States' full-scale involvement in the Vietnam War. The following is a speech delivered by President Johnson shortly after the resolution's passage.*

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

Document Analysis: President Johnson's Message to Congress August 5, 1964 on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident

Last night I announced to the American people that the North Vietnamese regime had conducted further deliberate attacks against U.S. naval vessels operating in international waters, and I had therefore directed air action against gunboats and supporting facilities used in these hostile operations. This air action has now been carried out with substantial damage to the boats and facilities. Two U.S. aircraft were lost in the action.

After consultation with the leaders of both parties in the Congress, I further announced a decision to ask the Congress for a resolution expressing the unity and determination of the United States in supporting freedom and in protecting peace in southeast Asia.

These latest actions of the North Vietnamese regime has given a new and grave turn to the already serious situation in southeast Asia. Our commitments in that area are well known to the Congress. They were first made in 1954 by President Eisenhower. They were further defined in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty approved by the Senate in February 1955.

This treaty with its accompanying protocol obligates the United States and other members to act in accordance with their constitutional processes to meet Communist aggression against any of the parties or protocol states.

Our policy in southeast Asia has been consistent and unchanged since 1954. I summarized it on June 2 in four simple propositions:

America keeps her word. Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments.

The issue is the future of southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us.

Our purpose is peace. We have no military, political, or territorial ambitions in the area.

This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity. Our military and economic assistance to South Vietnam and Laos in particular has the purpose of helping these countries to repel aggression and strengthen their independence.

The threat to the free nations of southeast Asia has long been clear. The North Vietnamese regime has constantly sought to take over South Vietnam and Laos. This Communist regime has violated the Geneva Accords for Vietnam. It has systematically conducted a campaign of subversion, which includes the direction, training, and supply of personnel and arms for the conduct of guerrilla warfare in South Vietnamese territory. In Laos, the North Vietnamese regime has maintained military forces, used Laotian territory for infiltration into South Vietnam, and most recently carried out combat operations - all in direct violation of the Geneva Agreements of 1962.

In recent months, the actions of the North Vietnamese regime have become steadily more threatening...

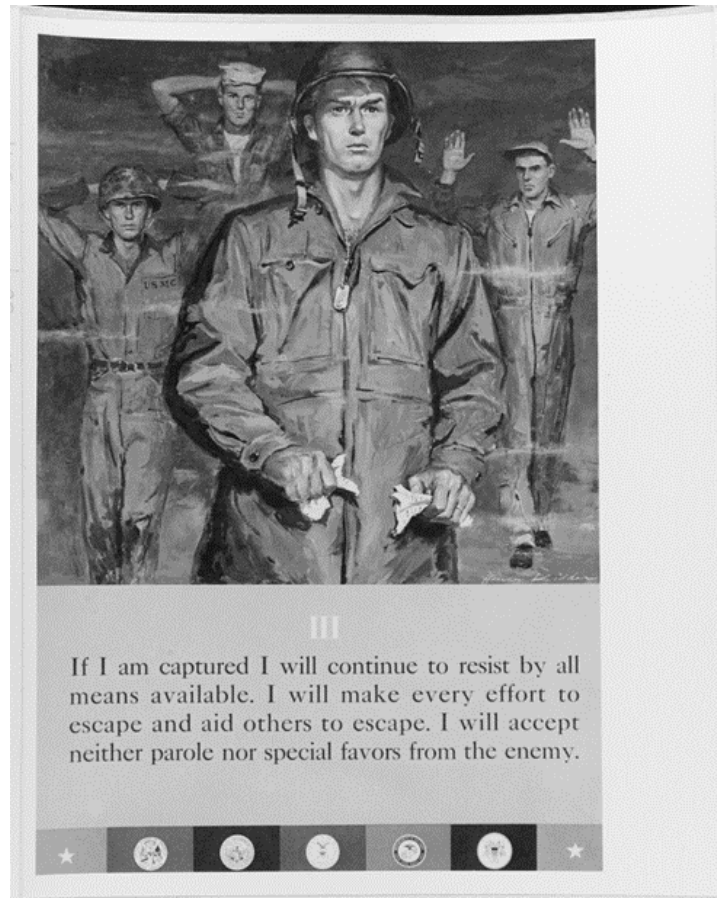
As President of the United States I have concluded that I should now ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the United States will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom.

As I have repeatedly made clear, the United States intends no rashness, and seeks no wider war. We must make it clear to all that the United States is united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in the area. We seek the full and effective restoration of the international agreements signed in Geneva in 1954, with respect to South Vietnam, and again in Geneva in 1962, with respect to Laos...

Source: President Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Speech https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/tonkin-g.asp

HANDOUT | Activity 1 Source 4: The United States POW Code of Conduct and Two Pilots' First Hand Recount an Early Prisoner of War Interrogation

The American POW Code of Conduct:



- I. I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.
- II. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist.
- III. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.
- IV. If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.
- V. When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.
- VI. I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.

Source: Naval History and Heritage Command <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/prisoner-of-war.html>
 Image Source: Naval History and Heritage Command <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/KN-25000/KN-25705.html>

Summary: *August 5, 1964: Naval Aviator Lieutenant Everett Alvarez is shot down during U.S. airstrikes against North Vietnam. He will spend the next eight and a half years in the infamous Hỏa Lò Prison. This is a first-hand account of his experience in his own words from the documentary "Return With Honor" (10:26).*

"The initial days (of being a Prisoner of War) was a learning experience for me and for the North Vietnamese. It was the first time they had somebody, I don't feel they really knew what to do or how to handle me. As a POW, you're not supposed to give anything other than *name, rank, service number, date of birth*. So, I wasn't answering anything else. They finally asked "why don't you answer?" I said well according to the Geneva Agreements [Third Geneva POW Convention of 1949], I'm not supposed to answer as a prisoner of war." They responded by saying "*you're not a prisoner of war. There's no war. There are no diplomatic relations between your country and my country. You don't think that there's somebody going to come in here and represent you?*" He then says: "*you're in our hands now. We consider you a criminal, a war criminal.*" So, I remember my thinking was, "Oops, so what do I do now?"

Source: Commander Everett Alvarez Jr. from the PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor" WGBH 2000.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

Summary: *Commander James Stockdale was one of the first Naval Aviators who was shot down during "Operation Rolling Thunder" in 1965. He would spend the next 7 ½ years in Hỏa Lò. This is a recount of one of his earliest interrogations, in his own words from the documentary "Return With Honor" (28:58).*

They walked me into a room, with senior officers on both sides. Now the man in question was in civilian clothes. I knew who he probably was. Vin Quak Vin [*one of Ho Chi Minh's top lieutenants*]. I'd heard that name at Stanford. He was the propaganda expert of North Vietnam. He was totally fluent in English and we talked. He was not hostile. He was picking my brains and I was picking his. But here was the punch line, there was nothing dramatic or irate, he said, "*you know about the war as a matter of weapons.*" He said, "*the Vietnamese people know that we cannot compete with you on the battlefield.*" But he said "*it's not that that wins wars anyway. It's the national will. And when the American people get the idea of what this war is all about, they will lose interest in pursuing it.*" He said, "*we are going to win this war on the streets of New York. And when the American people understand the war and you and your fellow prisoners are going to help them understand it, you will be their teachers. Then the war will go away.*" We were a major factor in the strategy of the Vietnamese and we would be sort of a branch of the American anti-war movement. That's what they had in mind.

Source: Vice Admiral James Stockdale from the PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor" WGBH 2000.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT | Activity 1 Source 5: The Politburo Resolution 20 November 1969

Summary: *Two months after Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969, and five years after the first POWs were captured, the North Vietnamese government issued the Politburo Resolution. This would become North Vietnam's official policy for handling United States' POWs for the remainder of the war.*

Politburo Resolution No. 194-NQ/TW, 20 November 1969

On Policy Toward Captured American Pilots in North Vietnam

1. Our humanitarian policy toward American pilots is aimed at further illuminating our just cause in order to win over the American people, support our enemy proselytism operations, and win the sympathy of world opinion for our people's resistance war against the Americans to save the nation.

Even though we do not view American pilots as prisoners of war and we are not bound by the terms of the 1949 Geneva Convention governing the treatment of prisoners of war, we should apply the points of the Geneva Convention that are consistent with our humanitarian policies.

2. For that reason, we must fully implement the following points:

- Provisions for their daily lives (food, clothing, medicine) should be maintained at the current levels.
- Their places of detention must be clean and airy. A program should be implemented to allow them to exercise and work in order to help them maintain their health.
- With regard to political education, we should study appropriate goals and subjects, with the primary focus on making them understand the goals and the justice of our people's cause of resisting the Americans to save the nation, to understand the humanitarian policies of our government, and to cause them to respect the regulations of our prison camps.
- With regard to mail, they should be allowed to send one letter a month, and they should be allowed to receive gifts once every two months. This must be properly organized, implemented, and inspected in order to ensure that the mail is delivered fully and quickly. Inspection of gifts should be focused primarily on preventing the receipt of weapons, explosives, anesthetics, and poisons.
- From now until early 1970, we should gradually allow the American pilots that we are currently detaining in secret to contact their families by sending postcards.
- The personal effects of the pilots must be properly stored and maintained so that they can be returned to them in the future, or, in the event that the prisoner dies, to be returned to their families. Items that have been misplaced should be looked for and recovered so that they can be properly maintained for future return.
- As for the issue of religious services, arrangements should be made for them to attend church services regularly. We should assign a number of good [reliable] Catholic priests or Protestant pastors (depending on the prisoners' religion) to this task in order to combine holding church services with our efforts to educate them.
- With regards to the graves of those who have died, they need to be concentrated into a number of central locations to facilitate administration and so that later we can return the remains to their families.

3. In addition to strengthening the forces assigned to handle the American pilots, we need to ensure that the cadres and enlisted men directly responsible for this task fully understand the political significance of our policy toward the pilots in order to increase their spirit of responsibility so that they will strive to overcome difficulties and will fully implement the policy provisions outlined in this resolution.

4. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Political Department will study the possibility of allowing the Red Cross Associations of some countries to visit the prisoners.

For the Politburo, [signed] Nguyen Duy Trinh

Source: Politburo Resolution from the Wilson Center for Digital Archives

https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/north-vietnam-politburo-resolution-no-194-ngtw-policy-toward-captured-american-pilots?_gl=1%2Aajahcsi%2A_gcl_au%2AMTEfNzloMjcZNC4xNzQ2NzA4MTU3%2A_ga%2AODYzMDA1MTQ1LjE3NDY3MDgxNTg.%2A_ga_6MDYB7KP94%2AczE3NDY3MDgxNTgkbzEkZzAkdDE3NDY3MDgxNTgkajYwJGwwJGgw

HANDOUT 1 Activity 1 | Socratic Seminar Teacher Script

Directions: Socratic Seminar is a structured, student-led discussion focused on a text or idea, where participants explore complex concepts through questioning and dialogue. In a Socratic Seminar, students take ownership of the discussion, facilitating the exchange of ideas and seeking deeper understanding. After students have completed building background by reading primary and secondary sources with the Road to War Source Reflection Chart, they will create questions for the seminar.

All students will write levelled questions, consistent with the Socratic method, to deepen discussions of the texts, for the whole class.

- Level I questions (DOK 1) will be factually based and answered directly in the text. These literal questions often begin with words like "What," "When," "Who," and the text clearly states the single correct answer.
- Level II questions (DOK2-3) are about the text, but multiple answers are arguably correct as supported by various interpretations of the text. These questions often begin with words like "Why" and "How."
- Level III questions (DOK 3-4) are open and do not directly address the text (people, places, events, concepts, etc.) but are *inspired* by the text. These questions often begin with words such as "What if," "Why not," "How might," and other words that preface concepts that are not necessarily parts of the text at all. This invites creative discourse and extends the message of the text with original ideas.

Socratic Seminar is student-led with the explicit goals of involving every student and adhering to seminar norms which include signals that one wishes to speak and invitations to request responses from students who have not yet contributed to the discussion. It is important that after the Socratic Seminar "kickoff" question, the teacher simply listens and provides no feedback other than attention during the process.

- A. At the beginning of the seminar ask the following question to initiate the discussion: "Was the United States' involvement in Vietnam a defense of freedom, or an unjustified act of aggression?"
- B. Allow the students to conduct the seminar.
- C. At the end of the seminar, students will receive a reflection writing assignment that requires they address one of the following prompts:
 1. Which perspective or argument during the discussion did you find most compelling, and why?
 2. How has your understanding of U.S. involvement in Vietnam changed or deepened because of today's seminar?
 3. In what ways did the primary and secondary sources shape or challenge your thinking about the Vietnam War?
 4. Do you believe American actions in Vietnam reflected the democratic values the U.S. claimed to uphold? Explain.
 5. How did the personal accounts of POWs and Vietnamese leaders influence your view of war and human resilience?

Goals: Students will analyze the causes, major events, and consequences of the Vietnam War using primary and secondary sources. Through close examination of government documents, personal accounts, and speeches, students will also evaluate the human impact of war, particularly on American service members and prisoners of war, to deepen their understanding of how political decisions affect these individuals.

HANDOUT 2 Activity 1 | The Causes, Course, and Consequences of the Vietnam War: Reflection Chart

Name: _____

Topic Area	Author/Perspective	Key Claims	Purpose	Connection to U.S. involvement in Vietnam	One discussion question you have OR you'd like to ask peers
U.S. and Geneva Accords					
Ho Chi Minh and Nationalism					
Gulf of Tonkin and War Escalation					
POW Coded vs. Vietnam POW Experiences					
The Politburo Resolution					

HANDOUT 1 Activity 3 | Socratic Seminar Participation Tracking Sheet

Contribution #	Type of Contribution (Check One)	Claim / Counterclaim (Summarize Argument)	Evidence Used (Quote or Source)	Effective? (Why or Why Not?)
	☐ Claim ☐ Counterclaim ☐ Clarification			
	☐ Claim ☐ Counterclaim ☐ Clarification			
	☐ Claim ☐ Counterclaim ☐ Clarification			
	☐ Claim ☐ Counterclaim ☐ Clarification			
	☐ Claim ☐ Counterclaim ☐ Clarification			

HANDOUT | Activity 2 Source 1: Life as a POW: Being Captured

Life as a POW: Being Captured: *A collection of first-hand accounts from Vietnam War prisoners of war, told in their own words.*

Your entire life passes before your eyes as you are floating down, attached to a parachute. You think of your wife and kids. The United States Air Force had seen fit to send me to Survival School, to Water Survival School, to Jungle Survival School. all the training that I needed for escape and evasion. I came through the trees and landed right in the middle of a small village... I escaped and evaded for about five seconds **(Return with Honor, 16:14)**.

1st Lieutenant Leroy Stutz, Air Force POW, for 6 years, 3 months.

This guy kept looking at me and saw I was in pain. My leg was broken badly. I received one act of kindness. I kept saying "s'il vous plait" and "s'il vous plait, merci," and pointing, doing anything I could think of to indicate that he should pull my leg out straight. All I could do was just point to my leg. This guard looked around, nobody around. Put his rifle up against the tree, sat down, jammed his foot into me, put my foot underneath his armpit, gave a big mighty shove, straightened my leg, and then laid it down on the ground **(Return with Honor, 19:42)**.

Lieutenant Mike McGrath, Navy, POW for 5 years, 9 months.

John McCain became my second roommate. He was absolutely on the verge of death when I first saw him. He'd been terribly wounded, broken up in the bail out. His knee was very dysfunctional. He was in a body cast that was just grotesque. His arm poked out of his cast like a twig sticking out of a snowman. I was just positive when he came into the room that they'd dumped him on us to make it look as if we let him die. We had an Air Force Major named Norris Overly who acted as nurse for both of us. So, this fellow was basically feeding John and washed him for the first time I'm sure since he'd been in Hanoi. John was determined that he was going to live and determined to try to move and get his body going and that in itself was just excruciating for him but it's one of those things that you have to do if you're going to survive **(Return with Honor, 71:28)**.

Major George "Bud" Day, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 5 months, Medal of Honor Recipient.

We began to talk about the war. How long are we going to be there and everything and I was thinking well I'm only going to be there about six months or so. And then, Charlie says oh, we're probably going to be here for about two years. *Two years?* And when I finally came to that realization, *my God, that's going to be a long time. And when it just kind of hit me all at once. I just took my blanket and kind of balled it up and I just buried my head, in this blanket, and just literally screamed with this anguish that it's going to be that long. TWO YEARS!!!* When I was finished, I felt, *okay, I can do that. I can do two years...* Of course, as it turned out, it was two years... and it was two years after that... and two years after that, until it was about seven years in my case. But who was to know at that time? **(Return with Honor, 43:38)**.

1st Lieutenant Jerry Driscoll, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 10 Months.

Source: The PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor," WGBH 2000. Obtained from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT | Activity 2 Source 2: Life as a POW: Surviving Captivity

Life as a POW: Surviving Captivity: *A collection of first-hand accounts from Vietnam War prisoners of war, told in their own words.*

I really thought before I was shot down that I was the toughest fighter pilot in the world. That I was John Wayne, Superman all rolled up into one. *By God, they couldn't break me, I was one tough son of a gun. I found out real fast how weak I was. Pain may cleanse but by God, it also hurts. You cry, you bleed, you pray, and you scream. When you scream, they stick a dirty rag in your mouth, so they don't have to listen to you. The thing that affected me the most was that I didn't want to die here and have nobody even know what happened to me* (**Return with Honor, 34:25**).

1st Lieutenant Leroy Stutz, Air Force POW, for 6 years, 3 months.

One night stands out clearly in my memory. The guard that night was a young man, about eighteen years old, we called "Smiley." He seemed like a decent person, who was just following orders. It was clear he didn't enjoy what he was being told to do. The camp commander had likely ordered him to "break me." As it [the torture] went on, I remember thinking, Lord, I've prayed every prayer I know. I've asked for help in every way I can, and I have nothing left to give. I had reached a point where I had fully surrendered and said, *God, it's all in your hands now.* In that moment of total surrender, something changed. The pain disappeared, and it felt like a warm blanket had been placed over me. I felt comforted, safe, and completely at peace, as if nothing bad could touch me again. Smiley was still doing what he was ordered to do, but when he looked at me, something in my expression must have said, *You're not hurting me. You can't break me.* At that moment, his face changed. He started crying, dropped the rope, and ran outside shouting at the officer in charge (**Return with Honor, 40:30**).

Having tortured me for my confession, they were going to hope they could carry over to an interview, in which I would say the words they wanted me to say. I was planning on saying the opposite of what they briefed me on. When I saw the lights of the TV cameras, I decided I'd blink my eyes in Morse Code and spell out the word torture over and over again. This was in case they tried fitted words, that were apologetic on my part, into my mouth. In other words, I faked it. I would at least let them [the people back home] know I'd been tortured by the T-O-R-T-U-R-E (**Return with Honor, 41:43**).

Commander. Jeremiah Denton, Navy, POW for 7 years, 7 Months.

There's an area where you say okay: *I'm going beyond name, rank, serial number and date of birth. I'm fabricating, I'm lying, I'm cheating, and I'm stealing.* All those things you don't want to do, but you can rationalize because you're not giving away anything that endangers your country, or the cause or your fellow prisoners of war. So, then we kind of boil it down to this and this is a very popular phrase now, "*return with honor.*" Don't do anything that you wouldn't go back and tell somebody else in your cell what you did and be ashamed (**Return with Honor, 49:46**).

1st Lieutenant Ed Mechenbier, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 8 months.

I was called up to interrogation. The head of all the camps was there, a fellow we called "The Cat." He said, "*would you like to go home?*" I said "*I'd have to think about that.*" The question on my mind was *whether I could survive.* On the morning of the Fourth of July, he said "*what's your final answer,*" and I said, "*my answer is still no,*" and he said to me in English, "*they taught you too well.*" He kicked the chair over behind him and left. The interrogator looked at me and said "*things are going to be very bad for you now.*" He was right (**Return with Honor, 75:10**).

Lieutenant Commander. John McCain, Navy, POW for 5 years, 5 months.

Source: The PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor," WGBH 2000. Obtained from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT | Activity 2 Source 3 Life as a POW: Communicating in Solitary Confinement

Life as a POW: Communicating in Solitary Confinement: *First-hand accounts of how Vietnam War POWs found ways to connect while being held alone.*

You get isolated. That's when the trouble begins. You have to communicate at virtually any cost. If you get caught and tortured for a little while, that's just the overhead. But you do it anyway **(Return with Honor, 35:24)**.

1st Lieutenant Ron Bliss, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 6 Months.

If you could picture across the top row A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, we left out K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. And if you needed a K you used a C. So uh, to tap it out, A was the first row, first column and it was tap tap. B was the first row, second column and you go tap-tap-tap. F was the second row, first column and you tap. And overtime you got to be pretty fast at this **(Return with Honor, 36:07)**.

Tap Code					
	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	J
3	L	M	N	O	P
4	Q	R	S	T	U
5	V	W	X	Y	Z

Source: Stuart I. Rochester "The Battle Behind Bars," Naval Historical Foundation/NHHC, Washington, DC, 2010.

To call someone up to get them tapping you'd tap on the wall and all Americans tap (tapping) but the Vietnamese if they were listening and trying to intercept it would tap back and they would hear another tap and couldn't figure out what they did wrong **(Return with Honor, 36:52)**.

Lieutenant Paul Galanti, Navy, for 6 years, 8 months.

We passed the equivalent of War and Peace, several times over, through different methods of communication **(Return with Honor, 37:02)**.

Lieutenant Tom McNish, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 6 months.

People swept in code, they shoveled in code, and flashed pans across halls in code. We pushed pieces of paper out from under a door or through a crevice and used the tap code **(Return with Honor, 37:06)**.

Major George "Bud" Day, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 5 months, Medal of Honor Recipient.

I tapped to Commander Denton for almost three years, *Tapping to a man that I had never seen his face or his body. I thought my uh, uh, what a strange thing it is that I had tapped into his mind and he into mine without ever having seen each other's face so that we knew each other's moods. However, we knew when we were happy by the sounds of the tap, or the way it was tapped, we knew if we were sad or mad or whatever.* As the conversation went, if the next word coming up, you knew what it was going to be by the first two letters or so, you give two quick taps, and many a times, all we did was sort of two quick taps because I knew what the next word and what the next word and what the next word was going to be. And I haven't had too many conversations like that in my life **(Return with Honor, 38:24)**.

Captain George McNight, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 6 months.

They wanted to keep us from communicating, they wanted to break us up. They wanted to split us up so that we couldn't gain strength from each other. They were never able to accomplish this for the entire time that we were there. That was our one major victory **(Return with Honor, 39:24)**.

Lieutenant Tom McNish, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 6 months.

The Sunday church service, it's a very simple happening on a Sunday morning where the senior man of each building would make some kind of a sound that we could all hear and we'd all stand up in the middle of the room, bow our heads and say the Lord's Prayer. And then a short time later, he'd make another sound, we'd all turn, face the east because we figured that was the shortest distance to the United States. We'd put our hand over our heart and we said the Pledge of Allegiance. We'd do this every single Sunday that we were in North Vietnam **(Return with Honor, 75:07)**.

1st Lieutenant Jerry Driscoll, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 10 Months.

When you first are locked up for a month or so you think, I'm going to lose my mind. I'm going to go crazy. But then suddenly it dawns on you, *tough luck! You're going to have to get to know yourself, and you do.* You discipline yourself, you don't just slop around. When you get out of bed, you have something to do, you have time set aside for exercises, you have time to set aside to memorize, to go over your list. The lists of the names of the prisoners. You have to recite them to yourself at least twice a day. And we had lists of like five hundred people by the end. You have time for prayer. There is no time when you're just lounging around. You've got to keep your mind active. You've got to think about your tactics. You've got to *think, think, think!* **(Return with Honor, 70:22)**.

Commander James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months, Medal of Honor Recipient.

Source: The PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor," WGBH 2000. Obtained from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT | Activity 2 Source 4: Life as a POW: Improved Treatment

Life as a POW: Improved Treatment: *A first-hand account from Vietnam War POWs, told in their own words.*

When Ho Chi Minh died, everything, sort of, started to improve from that period on **(Return with Honor, 76:42)**.

Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, Navy, POW for 8 years, 6 Months.

At that point, torture as a general rule stopped. And torture came from the highest levels of command. It was not something, some drunken camp commander did. Because on one day they had authority to torture and the next day they didn't **(Return with Honor, 77:00)**.

Lieutenant Commander Richard Stratton, Navy, POW for 6 years, 2 Months.

I had the experience of "Cat," [the nickname for a brutal officer] announcing to me a major policy statement. *Some officers and some guards had become so angry at what the Americans were doing to their country that they had far exceeded the limits which the government had wished they would observe in treatment of prisoners.* That they had brutally tortured us. That was the first time they ever acknowledged that it was torture, not punishment. Without mentioning Ho Chi Minh's name, passing the knowledge that Ho Chi Minh had been so lax as to let this happen. Or maybe had even ordered it, but now that he's dead we're fixing things. They never went so far as to observe the Geneva Conventions, but they made life better for us, from then on **(Return with Honor, 77:15)**.

Commander Jeremiah Denton, Navy, POW for 7 years, 7 Months.

Just being in that room with forty other roommates was just the most wonderful medicine that anybody could ever give you **(Return with Honor, 79:43)**.

Major George "Bud" Day, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 5 months, Medal of Honor Recipient.

Resistance posture was unified. You were reinforced in trying to do what was right. And then, we educated each other. People were teaching Spanish and Russian, Quantum Physics and you name it. As strange as it sounds, it was a quality life **(Return with Honor, 79:58)**.

Lieutenant Commander Richard Stratton, Navy, POW for 6 years, 2 Months.

We had "evenings at the movies." I was always tasked as the "John Wayne guy." I used to tell all the movies I'd ever seen about John Wayne's adventures **(Return with Honor, 80:05)**.

Captain John Fer, Air Force, POW for 6 years, 1 month.

We had a bamboo stick that we used to flush our body fluids down a hole outside. We'd sneak that stick in at night and a good golfer named Keith Hall would teach us how to play golf at nighttime and how to grip it and how to swing. I learned how to play golf using this stick **(Return with Honor, 80:35)**.

Lieutenant Mike McGrath, Navy, POW for 5 years, 9 Months.

Source: The PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor," WGBH 2000. Obtained from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT | Activity 2 Source 5: Life as a POW: The Voices of Families

Life as a POW: The Voices of Families

Summary: Families of American POWs spent years in uncertainty, not knowing where their loved ones were or if they would return. Sybil Stockdale, whose husband, Navy pilot James Stockdale, would later receive the Medal of Honor for his leadership and resistance at the Hanoi Hilton, became a leading advocate, founding the National League of POW/MIA Families and pressing U.S. leaders for action. In the documentary *Return with Honor*, she and other spouses share their stories from the years their husbands were held captive. Here are their words:

There was a black car in Naval Air Station Lemoore. It would go around to people's homes, and you'd see three people: the base Commanding Officer, the squadron Commanding Officer's wife, and the base chaplain. When you saw them, you knew someone was gone (Return with Honor, 21:58).

Marlene McGrath, wife of Lieutenant Mike McGrath, Navy, POW for 5 years, 9 Months.

I was making dinner when the doorbell rang. My son answered it and said, "Mother, it's a General." I saw my minister, the post commander, and someone I didn't know. I knew something had happened to Tom (Return with Honor, 22:19).

Henry Etta Madison wife of Major Thomas Madison, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 11 Months.

I heard voices in the living room. My best friend came up the stairs and said, "Sybil, Jim is missing." She hugged me. I thought, How can anyone be missing? God would know where he is (Return with Honor, 23:00).

Sybill Stockdale, wife of Commander. James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months.

They were just two and three when he was shot down. I told them Daddy wasn't coming home for a while. I don't remember exactly what I said. I was so upset, I'm not sure what I told those poor little boys. (Return with Honor, 23:15).

Marlene McGrath, wife of Lieutenant Mike McGrath, Navy, POW for 5 years, 9 Months.

The first photo that came out showed he looked strong. We lived day to day, hoping for news. Mostly, we just prayed they weren't being tortured (Return with Honor, 23:40).

Lorraine Shumaker, wife of Commander Robert Shumaker, Navy, POW for 8 years, 1 Day.

*He was missing for eight months and the way I heard about the fact that he had survived was by getting two letters from him in the mailbox. And the second one he started out by saying one thinks of Vietnam as a tropical country but there is cold and darkness, even at noon. And of course, I knew right away that was a signal about the book *Darkness at Noon* which is a horrible account of the communist treatment of prisoners. (Return with Honor, 52:40).*

Sybill Stockdale, wife of Commander James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months.

In April of 1970 was the first time I really knew for a fact that he was alive when I received a letter from Mike. In his letter he called our son J.J., even though we always called our son John, I thought "oh my God, he's nuts. Something's wrong. Mike doesn't even remember our son's name." I didn't know that calling our son J.J., along with writing his letter in abnormally small handwriting, was a way to get a message through [sending secret coded messages to military intelligence in the letter]. (Return with Honor, 53:20).

Marlene McGrath, wife of Lieutenant Mike McGrath, Navy, POW for 5 years, 9 Months.

It bothered me that the pilots were called pirates. People were so negative. Steven and I chose not to tell anyone Tom was in Vietnam. I didn't want our son teased. I stayed quiet to protect him (Return with Honor, 54:08).

Henry Etta Madison wife of Major Thomas Madison, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 11 Months.

[On organizing the National League of POW/MIA Families] It started around somebody's kitchen table in San Diego **(Return with Honor, 67:35)**.

Phyllis Galanti, wife of Lieutenant Paul Galanti, Navy, POW for 6 years, 8 months.

The goal was to raise public awareness—getting people to write letters, wear bracelets, and support us. **(Return with Honor, 67:44)**.

Alice Stratton, wife of Lieutenant Commander Richard Stratton, Navy, POW for 6 years, 2 Months.

We wanted the policy changed. The "keep quiet" policy meant never talking to the press, never saying anything about your husband. **(Return with Honor, 67:56)**.

Sybill Stockdale, wife of Commander. James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months.

We tried to personalize it. I told Paul's story, showed his picture, and shared his life. We wanted the world to know, to pressure the North Vietnamese for better treatment **(Return with Honor, 68:05)**.

Phyllis Galanti, wife of Lieutenant Paul Galanti, Navy, for 6 years, 8 months.

We went to Paris, hoping to meet with North Vietnamese representatives at the peace talks. Our husbands had been missing for eight months to four years. We didn't know if we were wives or widows **(Return with Honor, 68:30)**.

Bonnie Singleton, wife of 1st Lieutenant Jerry Singleton, Air Force, POW for 7 years, 11 Months.

On May 19, 1969, Melvin Laird who was then Secretary of Defense made the declaration that the prisoners were not being treated humanely. That was a great satisfaction to me and to all of us wives who had been working so hard just because the policy was changed **(Return with Honor, 69:00)**.

Sybill Stockdale, wife of Commander James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months.

What went through my mind was that this is my husband and I haven't seen him for six years. So, that was a little bit scary for a while until we actually spoke. **(Return with Honor, 95:35)**.

Henry Etta Madison wife of Major Thomas Madison, Air Force, POW for 5 years, 11 Months.

That morning I finally saw Bob, I was very nervous. Then all of a sudden, I was concerned about how our son Grant would react. He was looking up at me, just a bright little kid, but very shy. I was concerned he wouldn't hug his father and that would hurt Bob, so I looked at him and I said "*what are you gonna do when you see Daddy?*" He shrugged his shoulders and looked at me. I said *I'm gonna run up and give him a big kiss*, and he looked at me still with his big eyes and didn't comment. I looked back down and said "*I'll beat you to him.*" Bob came out of the plane. I said, "*there's your daddy,*" and in front of thousands of people, Grant left my hand and ran up to his dad. I think Bob had a little speech to give, but was too emotional to give it. **(Return with Honor, 97:08)**.

Lorraine Shumaker, wife of Commander Robert Shumaker, Navy, POW for 8 years, 1 Day.

The first morning Jim was home, he got the newspaper and sat down at the breakfast table to read it. I thought, *I've had that paper for seven and a half years, what is this all about?* **(Return with Honor, 101:41)**.

Sybill Stockdale, wife of Commander James Stockdale, Navy, POW for 7 years, 5 months.

Source: The PBS American Experience Documentary: "Return with Honor," WGBH 2000. Obtained from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/honor/#transcript>

HANDOUT 1 | Activity 2: Think, Pair, Share: POW Life During the Vietnam War - Carousel

Name: _____

Directions: Visit each station and analyze first-hand accounts from American POWs during the Vietnam War, combine key themes, and reflect on the physical, emotional, and moral challenges these individuals faced.

Station 1: Life as a POW: Being Captured: What mental or emotional reactions did POWs have immediately after being captured? How did survival training help or not?

Station 2: Life as a POW: Surviving Captivity: How did torture test POWs' ideas of strength and loyalty? What role did mental attitude play in surviving torture?

Station 3: Life as a POW: Communicating in Solitary Confinement: Why was communication so critical to POWs' survival and morale? How did they show ingenuity under harsh conditions?

Station 4: Life as a POW: Improved Treatment: How did the prisoners adapt once treatment improved? What does this suggest about human resilience?

Station 5: Life as a POW: The Voices of Families: How did families back home impact the way POWs were treated? What risks did Sybil Stockdale take in speaking out?

Select two POWs from the readings whose experiences moved you the most. For each POW, answer the following:

1. Describe the situation they faced (capture, torture, survival, communication, etc.) in your own words.
2. Identify two character values (from Patriotism, Citizenship, Courage, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment) that they demonstrated.
3. Explain how each trait helped them survive or resist during captivity.
4. What can we learn from the POWs about Patriotism, Citizenship, Courage, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment?
5. How might these values still matter in our lives, even if our nation is not at war?

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.

HANDOUT 1 Activity 3 | Medal of Honor Recipient Source 1: James Bond Stockdale**James Bond Stockdale**

Photo courtesy of United States Navy

United States Navy Rank: Vice Admiral

Conflict/Era: Vietnam War

Unit/Command: Attack Carrier Air Wing 16, U.S.S. Oriskany

Aircraft: A-4 Skyhawk

Medal of Honor Action Date: September 4, 1969

Medal of Honor Action Place: Hòa Lò Prison, Hanoi, North Vietnam

Years spent as a Prisoner of War: 7 ½

Vietnamese Prison Camp: Hòa Lò Prison aka "The Infamous Hanoi Hilton."

Medal of Honor Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while senior naval officer in the prisoner-of-war camps of North Vietnam. Recognized by his captors as the leader in the prisoners' of war resistance to interrogation and in their refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Adm. Stockdale was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture after he was detected in a covert communications attempt. Sensing the start of another purge, and aware that his earlier efforts at self-disfigurement, to dissuade his captors from exploiting him for propaganda purposes, had resulted in cruel and agonizing punishment, Rear Adm. Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifice. He showed a willingness to do whatever was necessary, including sacrificing his life, for the safety of his fellow POWs, rather than capitulate. Convinced of his indomitable spirit, his North Vietnamese captors abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all the prisoners of war. By his heroic actions, at great peril to himself, he earned the everlasting gratitude of his fellow prisoners and of his country. Rear Adm. Stockdale's valiant leadership and extraordinary courage in a hostile environment sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Medal of Honor Details:

Awarded Posthumously: No

Presentation Date & Details: March 6, 1976 The White House, presented by President Gerald R. Ford

Born: December 23, 1923, Abingdon, Illinois

Died: July 5, 2005, Coronado, CA, United States (81 years old)

Buried: U.S. Naval Academy Cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland,

Resistance Without Surrender: The Stockdale Code

James Stockdale was as prepared as anyone could have been for the ordeal that awaited him after he ejected from his aircraft over North Vietnam on September 9, 1965. As a man of deep commitment and intellect, Stockdale had promised his father he would be the best Midshipman he could be when he enrolled in the U.S. Naval Academy. His drive to be the best continued through his graduate studies at Stanford University, where he earned a master's degree in International Relations, and in his military career, where he voluntarily completed POW training twice.

His academic background and military training helped him understand how the North Vietnamese might use American POWs for political warfare. As the senior-ranking Navy officer among the prisoners, Stockdale took on a leadership role. He organized resistance efforts, established a code of conduct, and helped to develop the tap code system, a secret method of communication that became essential for maintaining morale and unity among the captives. Many POWs later credited these systems with helping them survive the trauma of isolation and torture.

Stockdale was determined not to be used for enemy propaganda. He went to extraordinary lengths to resist exploitation and protect his fellow prisoners, even after several had died from torture. His defiance showed his captors that he would never break, and in doing so, he likely saved many lives.

For four of his seven years at the Hanoi Hilton, Stockdale was part of a group known as the "Alcatraz Gang." This was a group of POWs who were considered the most resistant. They were placed in extreme solitary confinement, and for two of those years, he was even kept in leg irons.

Back home, his wife Sybil Stockdale also played a critical role. Using letters from her husband that included coded information, she passed intelligence on to the U.S. Navy. While raising their four sons alone, she also founded the League of American Families of POWs and MIAs, helping make the safe return of American prisoners a top national priority.

After his release in 1973, Stockdale continued his military career, eventually attaining the rank of Vice Admiral. He retired in 1978 and began a respected academic career, which included serving as President of the Naval War College. In 1984, he and Sybil co-authored *In Love and War*, a dual memoir detailing his captivity and her efforts back home. In 1992 Stockdale ran for Vice President of the United States, as a part of Ross Perot's independent presidential campaign.

James Stockdale became one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the United States Navy. In addition to the Medal of Honor, his honors included two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Distinguished Service Medals, two Purple Hearts, and four Silver Stars.

"As a resistant leader, Jim had few peers. He was a constant inspiration. Many of his Vietnamese Captors hated him for his fierce and unyielding spirit."

- Quote from Senator John McCain's Essay in "Medal of Honor Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty"

Source: John T. Kuehn contribution to the James H. Willbanks "America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan" 2011 <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/americas-heroes-9781598843934/>, Naval Aviation Hall of Fame, James Stockdale <https://nationalaviation.org/enshrinee/james-bond-stockdale/>, and USNA Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership <https://www.usna.edu/Ethics/bios/index.php>

John McCain's Essay in "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty" 3rd Edition, Artisan Books 2011 <https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/peter-collier/medal-of-honor-revised-updated-third-edition/9781579657468/>

HANDOUT 2 Activity 3 | Medal of Honor Recipient Source 2: George Everett "Bud" Day

George Everett "Bud" Day



Photo courtesy of United States Air Force

United States Air Force **Rank:** *Brigadier General*

Conflict/Era: Vietnam War

Aircraft: F- 100 Super Sabre

Unit/Command: Misty Super FAC's F-100 Squadron Phu Cat Air Base

Military Service Branch: United States Air Force

Medal of Honor Action Date: August 26, 1967

Medal of Honor Action Place: North Vietnam

Years spent as a Prisoner of War: 5 ½ Years

Vietnamese Prison Camp: Hòa Lò Prison aka "The Infamous Hanoi Hilton."

Medal of Honor Citation:

On 26 August 1967, Col. Day was forced to eject from his aircraft over North Vietnam when it was hit by ground fire. His right arm was broken in three places, and his left knee was badly sprained. He was immediately captured by hostile forces and taken to a prison camp where he was interrogated and severely tortured. After causing the guards to relax their vigilance, Col. Day escaped into the jungle and began the trek toward South Vietnam. Despite injuries inflicted by fragments of a bomb or rocket, he continued southward surviving only on a few berries and uncooked frogs. He successfully evaded enemy patrols and reached the Ben Hai River, where he encountered U.S. artillery barrages. With the aid of a bamboo log float, Col. Day swam across the river and entered the demilitarized zone. Due to delirium, he lost his sense of direction and wandered aimlessly for several days. After several unsuccessful attempts to signal U.S. aircraft, he was ambushed and recaptured by the Viet Cong, sustaining gunshot wounds to his left hand and thigh. He was returned to the prison from which he had escaped and later was moved to Hanoi after giving his captors false information to questions put before him. Physically, Col. Day was totally debilitated and unable to perform even the simplest task for himself. Despite his many injuries, he continued to offer maximum resistance. His personal bravery in the face of deadly enemy pressure was significant in saving the lives of fellow aviators who were still flying against the enemy. Col. Day's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Armed Forces.

Medal of Honor Details:

Awarded Posthumously: No

Presentation Date & Details: March 6, 1976 The White House, presented by President Gerald R. Ford

Born: February 24, 1925, Sioux City, Iowa

Died: July 27, 2013, Ft. Walton Beach, Florida (88 years old)

Buried: Barrancas National Cemetery, Pensacola, Florida

Strength Beyond Survival: The Legacy of Bud Day

"Hard to kill" is perhaps the best way to describe Colonel Bud Day's incredible resilience both during his escape and evasion as a downed pilot in Vietnam and throughout his years of captivity at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." After being shot down, and subsequent escape, Day suffered numerous broken bones and shrapnel wounds, and he had lost his boots. When he was eventually recaptured, he was punished harshly, beaten severely, forced to march for miles, and subjected to intense interrogation and torture. Despite this, Day refused to give his captors any useful information.

As a POW, Day endured years of brutal treatment. Many of his injuries never fully healed, and his weight dropped to about 100 pounds. Still, he remained fiercely defiant. He was later transferred to a punishment camp known as "the Zoo," reserved for resistant prisoners. There, he was beaten so badly that his vision was permanently damaged. Even after conditions improved for many POWs, following the death of Ho Chi Minh, Day continued to be singled out for especially harsh treatment.

After his release in 1973, Day's determination did not fade. Despite lasting injuries, he fought to return to flight status, and succeeded. Within a year, he was again qualified to fly the F-4 Phantom and went on to serve as Vice Commander of the 33rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. He retired from the Air Force in 1976 and began a law practice in Ft. Walton Beach, where he continued to fight, this time in the courtroom. He led a class action lawsuit against the U.S. government on behalf of military retirees who had been denied promised medical benefits, proving once again that Bud Day never stopped fighting for what he believed in.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Day's honors included the Air Force Cross, Air Force Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, The Distinguished Flying Cross, four Bronze Stars with Valor, and 4 Purple Hearts. He retired as a Colonel, but was posthumously promoted to Brigadier General.

"I had the privilege of being Bud's friend for almost five decades of his 88 years," "He was a hard man to kill and expected the same from his subordinates, but more than that, he taught me how to save my self-respect and my honor, and that is a debt I can never repay."

- Senator John McCain at George "Bud" Day's Funeral, August 1, 2014

Source: Col. George "Bud" Day: Misty 01 from the National Museum of the United States Air Force

<https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/195949/col-george-bud-day-misty-01/>, James H.

Willbanks "America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan" 2011.

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/americas-heroes-9781598843934/> and "Emerald Coast pays tribute to Col. George "Bud" Day Air Force Special Operations Command" <https://www.afsoc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/495185/emerald-coast-pays-tribute-to-col-george-bud-day/>

HANDOUT 3 Activity 3 | Medal of Honor Recipient Source 3: Donald Gilbert Cook

Donald Gilbert Cook



Photo courtesy of United States Marine Corps

United States Marine Corps **Rank:** Colonel

Conflict/Era: Vietnam War

Unit/Command: Naval Advisor Group, U.S. Military Assistance Command

Medal of Honor Action Date: December 31, 1964 - December 8, 1967

Medal of Honor Action Place: in the vicinity of Binh Gia, Phouc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam

Time spent as a Prisoner of War: 3 Years

Vietnamese Prison Camp: Various Viet Cong Camps in the South

Medal of Honor Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while interned as a Prisoner of War by the VietCong in the Republic of Vietnam during the period from 31 December 1964 to 8 December 1967. Despite the fact that by doing so he would bring about harsher treatment for himself, Col. (then Capt.) Cook established himself as the senior prisoner, even though in actuality he was not. Repeatedly assuming more than his share of the manual labor in order that the other Prisoners of War could improve the state of their health, Col. Cook willingly and unselfishly put the interests of his comrades before that of his own well-being and, eventually, his life. Giving more needy men his medicine and drug allowance while constantly nursing them, he risked infection from contagious diseases while in a rapidly deteriorating state of health. This unselfish and exemplary conduct, coupled with his refusal to stray even the slightest from the Code of Conduct, earned him the deepest respect from not only his fellow prisoners, but his captors as well. Rather than negotiate for his own release or better treatment, he steadfastly frustrated attempts by the Viet Cong to break his indomitable spirit, and passed this same resolve on to the men with whose well-being he so closely associated himself with. Knowing his refusals would prevent his release prior to the end of the war, and also knowing his chances for prolonged survival would be small in the event of continued refusal, he chose nevertheless to adhere to a Code of Conduct far above that which could be expected. His personal valor and exceptional spirit of loyalty in the face of almost certain death reflected the highest credit upon Col. Cook, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service.

Medal of Honor Details:

Awarded Posthumously: Yes

Presentation Date & Details: May 16, 1980
The Pentagon, presented by Secretary of the Navy Edward Hidalgo to his family

Born: August 9, 1934, Brooklyn, New York

Died: December 8, 1967, Republic of Vietnam (33 years old)

Buried: Arlington National Cemetery (Marker Only), Arlington, Virginia

Leading from Weakness: The Strength of Captain Donald Cook

Captain Donald Cook had only been in Vietnam for 18 days when he was wounded and captured by Viet Cong forces during the Battle of Binh Gia. What followed was nearly three years of captivity in primitive jungle prison camps, where Captain Cook emerged as a symbol of leadership, courage, and selflessness.

As the senior-ranking officer among a group of prisoners of war, Cook refused to cooperate with his captors under any circumstances. He never gave up information, never signed documents, and never followed any enemy orders. Even when he was sick, starving, and physically weak, he still remained mentally strong and defiant.

Captain Cook consistently placed the needs of his fellow POWs above his own. He shared his meager rations, gave up precious medicine, and cared for others when they were sick or injured. His health steadily declined from malnutrition, disease, and the brutal conditions of the jungle. Yet he continued to lead, refusing to abandon his values or the men under his care.

Cook died from illness during a forced march in 1967. His story remained largely unknown until surviving POWs came forward years later to share his story.

In 1980, Secretary of the Navy Edward Hidalgo presented Cook's family with the Medal of Honor. To honor his legacy, the Navy named a destroyer, USS Donald Cook (DDG 75), after him.

"I believe he would have stopped using the bathroom if he had thought 'Charlie' [The Viet Cong] was using his waste for fertilizer..."

- Douglas Ramsey, a U.S. foreign service officer imprisoned with Cook

Source: Katie Lang's contribution to "Medal of Honor Monday: Marine Col. Donald Cook"

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1730921/medal-of-honor-monday-marine-col-donald-cook/> and "The Battle Behind Bars," Naval Historical Foundation/NHHC, Washington, DC, 2010

https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/publications/publication-508-pdf/BatBehindBars_508.pdf

HANDOUT 4 Activity 3 | Medal of Honor Source 4: Lance Peter Sijan

Lance Peter Sijan

Photo courtesy of United States Air Force

United States Air Force **Rank:** Captain

Conflict/Era: Vietnam War

Unit/Command: 480th Tactical Fighter Squadron,
Da Nang Air Force Base

Aircraft: F-4 Phantom II

Medal of Honor Action Date: November 9, 1967

Medal of Honor Action Place: Ban Loboy Ford & Ban
Kari Pass & Hoa Lo Prison, Laos & North Vietnam

Time spent as a Prisoner of War: 74 Days

Vietnamese Prison Camp: Hỏa Lò Prison aka "The
Infamous Hanoi Hilton."

Medal of Honor Citation:

While on a flight over North Vietnam, Capt. Sijan ejected from his disabled aircraft and successfully evaded capture for more than six weeks. During this time, he was seriously injured and suffered from shock and extreme weight loss due to lack of food. After being captured by North Vietnamese soldiers, Capt. Sijan was taken to a holding point for subsequent transfer to a prisoner-of-war camp. In his emaciated and crippled condition, he overpowered one of his guards and crawled into the jungle, only to be recaptured after several hours. He was then transferred to another prison camp where he was kept in solitary confinement and interrogated at length. During interrogation, he was severely tortured; however, he did not divulge any information to his captors. Capt. Sijan lapsed into delirium and was placed in the care of another prisoner. During his intermittent periods of consciousness until his death, he never complained of his physical condition and, on several occasions, spoke of future escape attempts. Capt. Sijan's extraordinary heroism and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty at the cost of his life are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Armed Forces.

Medal of Honor Details:

Awarded Posthumously: Yes

Presentation Date & Details: March 6, 1976
The White House, presented by Pres. Gerald R. Ford to his family

Born: April 13, 1942, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Died: January 22, 1968, Hanoi (Hoa Lo Prison), Vietnam
(25 years old)

Buried: Arlington Park Cemetery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The Crawl to Courage: The Lance Sijan Story

After ejecting from his aircraft, Captain Lance Sijan suffered a broken leg and a severe hand injury. Although a rescue helicopter attempted to recover him, Sijan refused to allow sending pararescuers into the hostile territory he was located in out of fear that it would endanger their lives. Determined to survive, he crawled over many miles of jagged rocks in hopes of reaching a safer pickup point, but eventually lost radio contact and was declared missing in action. Over the next 45 days, Sijan survived in the jungle with little or no food, using the growth of his beard to keep track of time.

When he was finally captured, Sijan weighed only about 80 pounds. Despite his weakened state, he managed to overpower a guard and escape, though he would be recaptured several hours later. . He was later transported with two other Air Force pilots to the infamous Hỏa Lò Prison in Hanoi. There, Sijan endured brutal interrogation and torture but he steadfastly refused to reveal any information, and he even threatening his captors. Though his injuries and infections continued to worsen, he remained defiant and continued to plan escape attempts until his death, approximately two months after his bailout.

News of Sijan's courage and sacrifice came to light when fellow POWs were released during Operation Homecoming in 1973. For his extraordinary bravery, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, along with the Air Medal, Purple Heart, and Prisoner of War Medal. His remains were eventually recovered and laid to rest in his hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

"He was 80 pounds and close to death, but he was a million miles away from giving up."

- The United States Air Force Academy

Source: Unbroken Will: The Lance Sijan Story Air Force Academy <https://www.usafa.edu/unbroken-will-captain-lance-p-sijan-story/>, National Museum of the United States Air Force <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/197498/unbroken-will-the-lance-sijan-story/>, and Wyndham E. Whynter contribution to the James H. Willbanks "America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan" 2011. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/americas-heroes-9781598843934/>

HANDOUT 5 Activity 3 | Medal of Honor Source 5: Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace

Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace



Photo courtesy of United States Army

United States Army Rank: Captain

Conflict/Era: Vietnam War

Unit/Command: Military Assistance Advisory Group, Detachment 52, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces

Medal of Honor Action Date: October 29, 1963 - September 26, 1965

Medal of Honor Action Place: An Xuyen Province, Republic of Vietnam

Time spent as a Prisoner of War: 2 Years

Vietnamese Prison Camp: Various Viet Cong Camps in the South

Medal of Honor Citation

Captain Humbert R. Versace distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism during the period of 29 October 1963 to 26 September 1965 while serving as an S-2 Adviser, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Detachment 52, Ca Mau, Republic of Vietnam. While accompanying a Civilian Irregular Defense Group patrol engaged in combat operations in Thoi Binh District, An Xuyen Province, Captain Versace and the patrol came under sudden and intense mortar, automatic weapons, and small arms fire from elements of a heavily armed enemy battalion. As the battle raged, Captain Versace, although severely wounded in the knee and back by hostile fire, fought valiantly and continued to engage enemy targets. Weakened by his wounds and fatigued by the fierce firefight, Captain Versace stubbornly resisted capture by the overpowering Viet Cong force with the last full measure of his strength and ammunition. Taken prisoner by the Viet Cong, he exemplified the tenets of the Code of Conduct from the time he entered into Prisoner of War status. Captain Versace assumed command of his fellow American soldiers, scorned the enemy's exhaustive interrogation and indoctrination efforts, and made three unsuccessful attempts to escape, despite his weakened condition which was brought about by his wounds and the extreme privation and hardships he was forced to endure. During his captivity, Captain Versace was segregated in an isolated prisoner of war cage, manacled in irons for prolonged periods of time, and placed on extremely reduced ration. The enemy was unable to break his indomitable will, his faith in God, and his trust in the United States of America. Captain Versace, an American fighting man who epitomized the principles of his country and the Code of Conduct, was executed by the Viet Cong on 26 September 1965. Captain Versace's gallant actions in close contact with an enemy force and unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect the utmost credit upon himself and the United States Army.

Medal of Honor Details:

Awarded Posthumously: Yes

Presentation Date & Details: July 8, 2002, The White House, presented by President George W. Bush to his brother Stephen Versace

Born: July 2, 1937, Honolulu, Honolulu County

Died: September 26, 1965, Republic of Vietnam (28 years old)

Buried: Arlington National Cemetery (Marker Only), Arlington, Virginia

Defiant to the End: The Spirit of Captain Rocky Versace

Captain Humbert "Rocky" Versace was the first U.S. Army soldier awarded the Medal of Honor for actions taken as a prisoner of war (POW) during the Vietnam War. His story is one of volunteerism, sacrifice, and courage.

While serving in Vietnam, Versace felt deeply moved by the struggles of the South Vietnamese people, especially the children in the town of Cà Mau. He found a purpose there in helping the local villagers and chose to extend his deployment by six months to continue his work with them.

Just two weeks before the end of his tour, Versace's unit was ambushed by the Viet Cong, and he was captured along with 1st Lt. Nick Rowe and Sgt. Dan Pitzer. For the next two years, Versace endured brutal captivity in the harsh jungle conditions, where he was deprived of food and water and was suffering from a serious leg injury. Despite these hardships, he attempted to escape four times. His resistance led his captors to isolate him from the others and confine him to a bamboo cage.

The Viet Cong tortured Versace, Rowe, and Pitzer in an effort to force them to confess to false war crimes. Versace refused to cooperate. He resisted fiercely, reportedly telling his captors to "go to hell" in English, Vietnamese, and French.

Despite relentless torture, Versace's spirit never broke. Fellow POWs and even local villagers remembered his defiance and leadership. According to witnesses, the last time he was seen alive, Versace was singing "God Bless America" loudly from his isolation cage. On September 26, 1965, the Viet Cong announced via radio that Captain Versace had been executed.

Although Lt. Rowe later escaped captivity in 1968 and helped write the nomination for Versace's Medal of Honor, the award was not approved at the time. Versace's family continued to lobby on his behalf, and in 2002, their efforts were finally rewarded when President George W. Bush presented the Medal of Honor to Versace's family in a White House ceremony. In addition to the Medal of Honor, Captain Versace was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.

"The last thing we heard was Captain Versace singing "God Bless America" at the top of his lungs."

- 1st Lt. Nick Rowe, fellow prisoner of war.

Source: Kiersten Laclede contribution to National Museum of the United States Army Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace Biography page <https://www.thenmusa.org/biographies/humbert-r-versace/> and James M. Cloninger's contribution to the James H. Willbanks "America's Heroes: Medal of Honor Recipients from the Civil War to Afghanistan" 2011 <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/americas-heroes-9781598843934/>

HANDOUT 1 CLASS ACTIVITY 3 | Handout 1 The Five W's of Defiant POWs who received the Medal of Honor

Directions: After reading about the five Medal of Honor recipients, use the guided notes to answer the following questions for each person:

- Who were they?
- What did they do to earn the Medal of Honor?
- When did their act of valor take place?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did they choose to act courageously?

Medal of Honor Recipient 1

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

Medal of Honor Recipient 2

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

Medal of Honor Recipient 3

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

Medal of Honor Recipient 4

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

Medal of Honor Recipient 5

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

How did these five Medal of Honor Recipients' courageous actions impact others around them?

How can their actions inspire us today?

Thinking back to the earlier activities where we learned about the goals of the United States and North Vietnam, the U.S. POW Code of Conduct, and what life was like as a prisoner of war. How do you think these factors influenced the courageous and defiant actions of the POWs who received the Medal of Honor?

What other Medal of Honor character values (Patriotism, Citizenship, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment) did these recipients exhibit?

HANDOUT 1 | CLASS ACTIVITY 4 EXIT TICKET: RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) Writing Project

Name: _____

Directions: You will choose a Role, Audience, Format, and Topic to create a piece of writing that brings the POW (Prisoner of War) experience to life. Your work should show a strong understanding of the experiences, challenges, and character values (*Patriotism, Citizenship, Courage, Integrity, Sacrifice, and Commitment*) demonstrated by these individuals during the Vietnam War. **You must pick: A Role, an Audience, a Format, and a Topic.** Make this project creative and informative.

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Vice Admiral James Stockdale	The general public	An op-ed article for a well-known newspaper, two years after returning home	The importance of keeping faith with his fellow prisoners and with America's ideals during his time as a POW
Senator John McCain	Attendees for the Funeral of James Stockdale in 2006 or George "Bud" Day in 2013	Eulogy	What does John McCain want people to remember about the war and the actions of James Stockdale, Bud Day and other Prisoners of War during the war in Vietnam?
Sybil Stockdale	Members of Congress	Testimony or report for a Congressional hearing	Persuasive speech to Congress to encourage the bringing home of the POWs to be Congress' top priority, while also acknowledging the causes, course, and consequences of the war.
Brigadier General George "Bud" Day	Family	Letter	Tell your family about life and survival as a POW in North Vietnam. <i>(Try to hide a hidden message in your letter about the real treatment you are receiving, as the Vietnamese captors would most definitely censor POWs' letters home).</i>
Local Newspaper Reporter	POW's Hometown Community	Obituary	Obituary about one of the five POW, Medal of Honor Recipient's life and the challenges they faced while serving.

RAFT Brainstorming**Step 1: RAFT Selections**

- Role: Who are you writing as?
- Audience: Who are you writing to?
- Format: What format will you use?
- Topic: What will you write about?

Step 2: Medal of Honor Values (Choose at least THREE)

Which of these values will you focus on?

Patriotism Citizenship Courage Integrity Sacrifice Commitment

Values I will focus on:

Step 3: Key Historical Details

List 3–5 important facts, quotes, or ideas you will use in your writing:

Step 4: Emotional Tone

What kind of tone will you use in your writing? (Circle one or add your own)

Serious Hopeful Inspirational

Urgent Reflective Other: _____

Step 5: Rough Outline

Beginning: How will you start? (Set the scene, hook your audience, introduce your situation.)

Middle: What are the main points or experiences you will describe?

End: How will you close your piece? (Reflect, call to action, or inspire your audience.)

Ready to Write!

Use this sheet to guide your final writing. Stay true to your role, connect deeply to the values, and use real historical details!

HANDOUT 2 CLASS ACTIVITY 4 || EXIT TICKET: RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) Writing Project Rubric

	RAFT CONTENT	CREATIVITY & ORIGINALITY	ORGANIZATION & CLARITY	LANGUAGE & GRAMMAR
4 Exceeds Expectations	- The Role is clear and compelling. - The Audience is clearly identified. - The Format is followed precisely and creatively. - The Topic is accurate and shows a deep understanding of the Vietnam War and the POW Experiences.	Highly creative and original; demonstrates deep thought, empathy, and unique insight into the role and context.	Exceptionally well-organized; ideas flow logically; clear transitions and strong conclusions.	Virtually free of grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors; language enhances the message.
3 Meets Expectations	- The Role is mostly clear and compelling. - The Audience is mostly addressed. - The Format is followed appropriately and supports the message. - The Topic is accurate and demonstrates an understanding of the Vietnam War and the POW Experiences.	Creative and thoughtful; shows understanding and personal engagement with the topic.	Organized and coherent; ideas are generally clear and follow a logical progression.	Minor errors that do not interfere with understanding.
2 Approaching Expectations	- Shows some understanding of the role, but lacks consistency. - Some attempt to address the audience but the tone or content may be inconsistent or unfocused. - The Format is present but is weakly executed or inconsistently applied. - The Topic shows limited understanding and includes some historical errors and/or irrelevant information.	Some original thinking, but lacks depth or creativity.	Organization is inconsistent; ideas may be hard to follow in places.	Noticeable errors that may distract the reader.
1 Below Expectations	- The Role is unclear and does not reflect the chosen character. - The Audience is unclear or inappropriately addressed. - The Format is missing or inappropriate for the task. - The Topic lacks understanding and contains significant inaccuracies.	Lacks originality or appears copied/rote.	Disorganized or unclear; ideas are difficult to follow.	Frequent errors that hinder readability.

Total Points: __ / 16

Grade: 14–16 Points = A

12–14 Points = B

10 – 12 Points = C

Below 10: Needs Revision