

ALBA Lesson Plan – Social Studies

Title: Using Complex Texts to Analyze Anti-War Responses to U.S. Intervention in Vietnam

Subject: U.S. History

Grade(s): 9-12

Standards: [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1](#) or [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#)

Also, [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#) or [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6](#)

Key words/phrases: Vietnam War, Communism, Fascism, Cold War, Isolationism, Interventionism, Civil Rights, Great Society

Essential Questions: Why did Americans oppose the Vietnam War? What can documents tell us about dissimilar viewpoints within the anti-war movement in 1967?

Synopsis: Escalation of the Vietnam conflict brought considerable controversy among Americans. Documents from 1967 by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Spanish Civil War veteran and U.S. History Professor Robert G. Colodny illustrate two anti-war perspectives for analysis.

Standard Alignment(s) Used: English Language Arts Common Core (reading historical sources)

Recommended Teacher Background: If not already familiar with the Spanish Civil War, a teacher could watch the 10-minute or 40-minute introduction to the Spanish Civil War among the [ALBA teacher resources](#).

Connections to other disciplines: U.S. Government, English Language Arts, Contemporary Issues, Economics

Number of Class Periods: Two to four class periods.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1 OR CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6 OR CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6	Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same

	historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
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Primary Sources:

Transcript from the speech: "Beyond Vietnam," by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Appendix I)

Essay: *Spain and Vietnam: An Historical Perspective*, by Robert G. Colodny (Appendix II)

Procedures

1. Lead-In/Hook: Introduce the economic concept of opportunity cost and benefit, and allocation of resources.
 - a. Ask students about something they have purchased recently with money that they earned, and whether or not they are satisfied with the purchase. What else could they have purchased instead and why didn't they purchase both or all things? Did they think about the "what else" when they made their purchase? Did they experience "buyer's remorse" afterward? Communicate that if they weighed the cost and benefit of a purchase and they feel satisfied with the decision they made, then in economic terms the decision was a good one and they allocated their resources in the most beneficial way.
 - b. Then ask students if they made a decision involving a relationship with a parent, peer, friend, group of friends, etc. in which their decision hurt someone. What made them decide to act in a way that was hurtful? Was it still the best decision even though it hurt someone? If it was not the best decision (cost outweighed benefit) can the decision be undone or changed? In what ways did their personal values guide their decision? Did they act against their own personal values?
 - c. Discuss with students that our president and members of Congress allocate limited resources based on values that they share. Those values often reflect the American people who elected them to office. The values of our government officials who make decisions differ; thus, the values of Americans do too, sometimes greatly. Also, when the president and Congress choose to allocate resources in one way they must give up using those resources in another way.
 - d. In one sense, the choice by our government to intervene in Vietnam can be thought of as an economic choice in which the resources our government dedicated toward war could not be used for other needs and wants of American people that the government might help provide. Many Americans weighed in on whether the decision to intervene in Vietnam had greater benefits than costs, or vice versa. In 1967 it was becoming more and more apparent to some Americans that the costs of fighting in Vietnam outweighed the benefits.
 - e. The war also created a moral crisis among Americans. Opponents of the war felt that the costs had the greatest of consequences – the destruction of a culture in Vietnam, and cynicism and an erosion of values at home.
2. Pre-assessment and activation of prior knowledge:
 - a. This lesson assumes that students have been introduced to events and vocabulary of the Vietnam War up to 1967, including relevant Cold War vocabulary such as containment and the Domino Theory. It also assumes that students have a knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement and its major events, and a basic understanding of Lyndon Johnson's War of Poverty.

- b. Before the lesson, students should understand that the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, was on one level a war between fascism and democracy, in which rebel forces supported by Nazi Germany overthrew a democratically elected republic and installed a military dictatorship just before World War II began. Second, nearly 3,000 Americans defied their government's official stance of neutrality and traveled to Spain to fight on the side of the republic. Among the goals of the republic before the war was land reform intended to reduce the economic divide between wealthy landowners and landless peasants. Also, the Spanish Civil War was the first time in which defenseless civilians were bombed, in this case by German and Italian warplanes. The most notable example was in the Basque(northern Spain) town of Guernica, immortalized in a famous painting of the same name by Pablo Picasso.

3. Step by Step:

- a. After reviewing terms and concepts above, divide students into groups of three or four and give all students in each group the document from Appendix I – excerpts from the text of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech at Riverside Church in 1967. Students can either read silently or take turns reading paragraphs aloud. After reading, have students quietly, on their own write responses to the following questions. After they have crafted their responses, ask students to compare their answers within their group and/or compare them in a teacher-led discussion:
 - I. In what ways does King (in this excerpt) connect the war with civil rights, poverty, and the economic concept of allocation of government resources.
 - II. King also creates a comparison between the U.S. and Nazi Germany. Explain his viewpoint.
 - III. Finally, King is concerned about the legacy of our actions in Vietnam? In this regard, why does he believe we should withdraw from Vietnam?
- b. Hand out the document from Appendix II – excerpts of *Spain and Vietnam: An Historical Perspective*, 1967, by Robert G. Colodny. Inform students that Colodny (1915-1997) fought in Spain and was a member of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade organization. When he wrote this essay he was a history professor at the University of Pittsburgh. Follow the same reading and writing steps as with the first document, but with the following questions:
 - I. How do you think Colodny's experience as a veteran of the Spanish Civil War affected his perspective about the Vietnam War? Explain how a veteran such as Colodny might have a different perspective from someone like Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - II. In what ways are Colodny's beliefs about American participation in Vietnam similar to the views of Martin Luther King, Jr.? Describe two examples, using quotes to support your description.
 - III. Based on these excerpts, does Colodny have a different "main emphasis" than King? What is it, and what would account for this?

4. Closure: As a lead-in to lessons about the period of the war between 1968 and 1975, discuss with students that the anti-war writings of King, Colodny and many others became the inspiration for citizens who took action in ever-increasing numbers against our involvement in Vietnam; furthermore, the citizen action was instrumental in helping reshape the legacy and history of the war.

Differentiation:

- **Advanced:**

- Discuss a current world military/political conflict and ask what action, if any, the U.S. should take in influencing the outcome of the conflict. For example, in 2014 our president and Congress decided to provide limited military assistance to rebels in Syria. On what American values did our government base its decision? How will we know whether or not the decision was the best one or even a good one? Do decisions we have made historically inform/influence decisions we make today? What are some current examples of how people at home or abroad protest government actions, especially in the age of social media.
- Connections to English Language Arts: Find online the complete essay of Colodny and the complete transcript of King’s speech. Both men quote Langston Hughes in their presentations. Analyze the way both men use Hughes’ poetry to provide support for their arguments. Why do they use different poems of Hughes?
- **Struggling:** Before reading the passages, define difficult vocabulary and names from each passage, including the following:
 - King’s speech: facile, eviscerated, solidarity, junta, initiative
 - Colodny’s essay: instigators, Tamerlain, hamlet, epoch, *schrecklichkeit*, mobilize, martyr, languishing

Assessment –

1. Possible extended answer questions on a unit test over the Vietnam War could include (in increasing levels of higher-order thinking):
 - a. Describe the different ways that Americans protested the war between 1967 and 1973 and provide specific examples to support your description.
 - b. Summarize and compare the anti-war sentiments of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert G. Colodny; paraphrase or recall quotes to support your summary/comparison.
 - c. Historians and citizens alike consider the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights era to be deeply connected events. Analyze how the following statements fit into this perspective, noting the similarities and differences between the statements:
 - i. MLK: *“We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem.”*
 - ii. Colodny: *“The young people who rode the freedom buses to Alabama, who died in Mississippi delta towns, who have mobilized their membership for a hundred peace marches, who have produced scores of martyrs already languishing in jail, deserve more from American society than death in counter-revolutionary wars.”*
 - d. The United States has adopted, at times during the 20th century, policies of isolationism (between the world wars) or interventionism (after World War II). Cite specific examples from our readings (quote or paraphrase) of how Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert G. Colodny would advise the U.S. government about when or when not to intervene in international conflicts. Also, where might King and Colodny agree or disagree in their advice?

Appendix I:

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Excerpts from “Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break Silence”

Delivered at Riverside Church, New York, April 4, 1967

Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it is not surprising that I have seven major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor -- both black and white -- through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such...

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would never live on the same block in Detroit. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor...

And as I ponder the madness of Vietnam and search within myself for ways to understand and respond to compassion my mind goes constantly to the people of that peninsula. I speak now not of the soldiers of each side, not of the junta in Saigon, but simply of the people who have been living under the curse of war for almost three continuous decades now. I think of them too because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution there until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries...

What do the peasants think as we ally ourselves with the landlords and as we refuse to put any action into our many words concerning land reform? What do they think as we test our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? Is it among these voiceless ones?

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation's only non-Communist revolutionary political force -- the unified Buddhist church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men...

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours...

Appendix II:

Robert G. Colodny

Excerpts from *Spain and Vietnam: An Historical Perspective* (online in full text here:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/241397530/Robert-Colodny-Spain-and-Vietnam-1967>)

Published by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, October 1967.

Spain became a laboratory where the instigators of World War II perfected their weapons, tested their strategy, learned the range of the 88's, the coordination of tank and airplane... Today in Vietnam tests are also being run... Today the magic of television makes us all direct, visual participants in Vietnamese violence... Thus we can watch the successors to Hitler and Mussolini perfect the techniques for the suppression of the modern Popular Fronts of the world. We can no longer say, however, that this is being done on the orders of the President and Secretary of Defense. It is done in our name, and it is we who have caused blood to be shed...

To tell the truth about Vietnam is a double-pronged enterprise. We are concerned not only with the innocent flesh we burn there; we are equally concerned with the moral future of our own society. How will we explain this to our children and to our children's children? We are a young people, and it is not part of our national character to have built-in historical insight. But this American crime in Vietnam will echo down through the centuries. It becomes a piece with the ravages of the Huns, the *furor teutonicus* of World Wars I and II. And when the history of Asia is retold in generations to come, along with the depredations of the Mongols and Tamerlain, future historians will recall the helicopter fleets, the body counts, the strategic hamlets, the free-kill zones, the U.S. Marines, and generals who proposed to bomb a nation into the stone age...

These multiple horrors will evoke bitter memories among those who supported the Spanish Republic. Who has forgotten Guernica? This was one small Basque town of 8,000 people. It was shattered in one afternoon in April, 1937, and that crime has haunted its perpetrators ever since. How many Guernicas have the U.S. bombers created in Vietnam? In remembering this terrible epoch, we will not do justice to our own generation if we do not recall also that the struggle and agony of the Spanish people deeply touched the conscience of the whole world, and that the response to German *schrecklichkeit* as displayed in Spain prepared the overthrow of fascism...

The young people who rode the freedom buses to Alabama, who died in Mississippi delta towns, who have mobilized their membership for a hundred peace marches, who have produced scores of martyrs already languishing in jail, deserve more from American society than death in counter-revolutionary wars.