

**Vietnamese American Experiences Model Curriculum**  
**California Department of Education**  
**Visualizing: Vietnamese Refugee Camps**  
**Grades: 11–12**

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**Area of Study:** Vietnamese Departures and Transit

**Compelling Question:** How did Vietnamese build communities and networks in refugee and relocation camps as they attempted to survive and traverse the hardships of life in transit?

**Lesson Question (Supporting Question):**

- What was life like in camps for Vietnam War refugees and how did individuals build communities?
- What were some of the difficulties that Vietnamese boat people faced during their time in first asylum countries?
- How did the type of refugee camp affect the individual experiences of refugees?

**Materials:**

- Supplies:
  - Access to laptop device
  - Calisphere Photo Collections
    - Camp Pendleton Photos
    - Fort Chaffee Photographs of Vietnamese and Cambodian Refugees
    - Project Ngoc Records Photos
    - The Vietnam War Photos
- Videos:
  - “Getting Here: Journeys from Vietnam”, timestamp 14:01–17:03

**Lesson Objective:**

Students will be able to make inferences about the daily life of Vietnamese War refugees in various camps (including Camp Pendleton, Hong Kong, and Fort Chaffee) by observing photos and producing a medium of choice.

**Ethnic Studies Theme:** This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *power and oppression* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students will consider war, migration and imperialism as contexts shaping citizenship and racialization. Students will analyze the consequences of the Vietnam war and refugee lived experiences through photos.

For additional guidance around ethnic studies implementation, refer to the *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum* (2021) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>.

**Historical Thinking Skills:** This lesson will facilitate student proficiency in *continuity and change*, one of Seixas' historical thinking skills (Seixas & Morton, 2013). To consolidate and express understandings about continuity and change. Students consider that periodization helps us organize our thinking about continuity and change. It is a process of interpretation, by which we decide which events or developments constitute a period of history.

**Standards Addressed:**

HSS-11.8 Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post–World War II America.

HSS-11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate the information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation including footnotes and endnotes.

**Lesson Assessment:** Students will curate their own artistic piece or written account that illustrates the life of Vietnamese refugees in various camps. Details should reflect the facts learned from the sources and images in this lesson.

**Suggested Amount of Time:** 60–80 minutes

**Lesson Background:**

For Vietnamese refugees, life in refugee camps was varied. Resources and conditions were contingent upon the different waves of displacement as well as the location of the camp. Since 1975, around 140,000 Vietnamese refugees have been housed in US military bases compared to the nearly 800,000 refugees housed in Southeast Asia's makeshift camps (Espiritu, 2014).

Although life in refugee camps is largely understood as monotonous, passive and unsettling, Espiritu (2014) notes that Vietnamese refugees were active at creating new lives in camps. Vietnamese refugees developed meaningful kinships, participated in manufactured social activities, and maintained cultural traditions like holiday celebrations. Additionally, refugees who were accepted for resettlement had English language courses, churches, activities, etc. Whereas those who were not eligible for resettlement languished in camps that were more prison-like.

Reference: Espiritu, Y. L. 2014. *Body counts the Vietnam War and militarized refuge(es)*. University of California Press.

### **Lesson Procedures:**

- a. Cultural Energizer (five to eight minutes)
  - i. Prompt students to draw a picture of their community (open to student interpretation).
    1. Encourage them to use photos only and no text.
    2. Once complete, have students share photos with a partner and elaborate on what is in the photo.
    3. Inform students that today's lesson topic will surround new found communities of Vietnamese refugees following their displacement from their home country.
- b. Interaction with first sources: Gallery Walk (10 – 15 minutes)
  - i. Teacher to display camp photos from Calisphere Collections (students do not have to interact with every photo on the exhibits - teacher can determine which ones to spotlight).
    1. Camp Pendleton Photos  
<https://calisphere.org/collections/26589/?rq=vietnam&q=>

2. Fort Chaffee Photographs of Vietnamese and Cambodian Refugees  
<https://calisphere.org/collections/45/>
  3. Project Ngoc Records Photos <https://calisphere.org/collections/52/>
  4. The Vietnam War Photos <https://calisphere.org/collections/26387/>
- ii. Images can be printed and displayed on large poster paper or wall, or provided to students digitally.
    1. Up to teacher discretion on the number of images for students to interact with and flow of gallery walk.
  - iii. As students prepare to preview images, have them create an observation log to interact with each image.
    1. Observation log suggested prompts:
      - a. What do you see?
      - b. How did refugees create community in this space? How did refugees organize their everyday lives?
      - c. What do you think is the history and/or context of the photos? Who took the photos? What is the purpose of the photos? What experiences of Vietnamese refugees can we glean from these photos?
  - iv. Pair and Share: Have students team up with classmate(s) to discuss their observations.
  - v. Come together as a class and discuss collectively.
- c. Building Context (15 minutes)
    - i. Provide context about the different Vietnam War refugee camps in Asia and the US. Teachers can also refer to the lesson background.
    - ii. Students can capture notes as the teacher goes through the following sources. Below is a list of suggested topics and resources:
      1. Share maps of the different camps via Vietnamese Heritage Museum: Refugee Camps. Website:  
<https://vietnamesemuseum.org/our-roots/refugee-camps/>

2. Discuss conditions, activities, duration of stays, and the diversity of experiences depending on the camp as discussed in readings.
  3. Watch Getting Here: “Getting Here: Journeys from Vietnam”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gtTikWQf3E> (14:01–17:03).
- d. Second interaction with sources (15 minutes)
- i. Have students return back to the gallery of photos and engage in a second interaction, again having them take notes on their observation logs to the following prompts:
    1. Knowing what you know now about the context of the photos, what do you see? How has your understanding changed from your initial observations?
    2. What do you see? What do you think those captured in the photos were thinking and feeling at the time?
    3. Have students consider other senses (see, touch, smell, taste, hear) when analyzing photos.
      - a. Example: What do you think the camp smelled like?
- e. Cultural Production (15–20 minutes)
- i. Students will curate their own artistic piece or written account that illustrates the life of Vietnamese refugees in various camps. It is preferred that students hand draw this art piece, but students can alternatively use a digital application. Drawings should include details similar to the photos they analyzed in the Gallery Walk. The final product can be open to a written, visual, or audio narrative.
    1. If students create an artistic piece, they should prepare a two to three sentence caption for their artistic product as well. Details should reflect the facts learned from the sources and images in this lesson.
- f. Conclusive Dialogue (10 minutes)
- i. Display all photos in a Gallery Walk format again. Drawings can be posted around the classroom.
  - ii. After students have had the opportunity to view their peers’ artwork, have them reflect on one of the following questions with a partner:
    1. What toll do refugee camps have on the people and families in them?

2. For broader agency of individuals: How did refugees build community in their camps, and what was life like for individuals? What friendships were made in the camps that may have endured today, after resettlement?
3. Has looking through the images before seeing the movie and hearing the presentation changed your original thoughts about Vietnamese refugees in refugee camps? Rather than coming to a conclusion, what are further questions you can ask about those in refugee camps?
4. Is 'camp' an appropriate word for these places?

### Scaffolding:

- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
  - Provide descriptions (text or spoken) for all images, graphics, video, or animations
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
  - Provide sentence starters or sentence strips
    - Provide the following sentence frames:
      - After the war, some Vietnamese refugees faced (Severe, Brutal, Rigorous, Tough, Difficult, Rigorous, Austere, Unforgiving) conditions in refugee camps, such as...(Overcrowding, Insufficient food, Lack of clean water, Poor sanitation, Limited medical care, Exposure to diseases, Inadequate shelter, Extreme weather conditions, Lack of privacy, Long periods of confinement, Limited educational opportunities, Psychological stress, Uncertainty about the future).
      - At the same, Vietnamese refugees were able to build community in their new lives in refugee camps, such as (Sharing resources., Starting schools., Holding cultural events., Running small businesses., Organizing sports activities., Holding religious gatherings., Teaching English language classes., Helping each other., Sharing traditional food., Having community meetings.)
- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:

- Invite personal response, evaluation and self-reflection to content and activities

For additional ideas to support your students, check out the UDL Guidelines at CAST, 2018 <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

### **Multilingual Learner Supports:**

- **Emerging:** Consider the following method to support with emerging students:
  - Writing: Require students to label visuals
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
  - Writing: Provide rubrics and exemplars to scaffold writing assignments
    - Using mentor text - Text written by authors used to analyze craft, a particular writing style, word usage, structure, etc.
- **Bridging:** Consider the following method to support with bridging students:
  - Writing: Require academic writing and the use of target academic vocabulary
    - Apply domain-specific vocabulary and general academic vocabulary in open sentence frames to perform functions, like describing or explaining, that target specific grammatical structures.

For additional guidance around scaffolding for multilingual learners, please consult the following resources:

- *English Learner Toolkit of Strategies*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ujkdc2xp1dqjzrlq55czph50c3sq1ngu>
- *Providing Appropriate Scaffolding*  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-to-olkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>
- *Strategies for ELD*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/dcp15ymah51uwizpmmt2vys5zr2r5reu>
- *ELA / ELD Framework*  
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-framework>
- *California ELD Standards*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/vqn43cd632z22p8mfzn2h7pntc71kb02>

### **Enrichment Opportunities:**

1. Have students listen to Calisphere Collections of oral histories of Vietnam War refugees <https://calisphere.org/search/?q=vietnamese%20oral%20history>. Discuss time in camps and create images to go alongside the stories they hear.
2. Students can do photo analysis of images captured on the website: *Vietnam: Journey of the heart*. (n.d.). Calisphere. <https://calisphere.org/collections/23823/>
3. Alternative Formative Assessment: Map Activity to Help Students Visualize Refugee Camps, Migration Patterns, and Reasons for their Location
  1. Identify Locations: Using the world map or globe, have students locate Vietnam and the countries where Vietnamese refugee camps were established (US, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, etc.).
  2. Mark the Camps: Using colored markers or pins, students should mark the locations of the refugee camps on the map. Each camp could be represented by a different color.
  3. Trace the Journey: Have students draw lines on the map to represent the possible routes that refugees might have taken from Vietnam to the various camps. Discuss the geographical challenges that might have influenced these routes (ocean currents, proximity to Vietnam, etc.).
  4. Discuss the Locations: For each camp, have students write suggestions on the map as to why it might have been located where it was. Factors to consider might include the country's proximity to Vietnam, its political relationship with Vietnam, its capacity to accommodate refugees, etc.
  5. Reflection: Ask students to reflect on what they've learned. How did geography influence the journey of Vietnamese refugees? What challenges might refugees have faced in reaching these camps? How might the experience of refugees have differed depending on which camp they ended up in?

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### **Supplementary Sources**

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