

Vietnamese American Experiences Model Curriculum
California Department of Education
Vietnamese Youth Organizations & Cultural Preservation in the Postwar
Generation
Grades 9–12

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Area of Study: Vietnamese Resettlement and Community Building

Compelling Question: What is Vietnamese America?

Lesson Question (Supporting Question):

- How have Vietnamese youth organizations (i.e: Vietnamese Student Associations, Vietnamese beauty pageants, and other similarly crafted youth organizations) shaped the landscape for cultural preservation in a contemporary world?
- How are different conceptions of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American negotiated by intersectional identities such as age/generation, gender, class, religion, and migration journeys?
- How are evolving Vietnamese American cultures expressed through art, literature, music, and politics?

Materials:

- Supplies:
 - A group of students in traditional Vietnamese attire performing a dance on stage [Photo]
 - A group of students in traditional Vietnamese attire performing on stage [Photo]
 - A large group of people in various traditional Vietnamese attire posing for a photo on stage [Photo]
 - Flyer for USC's Vietnamese Culture Night [Photo]
- Readings:
 - Cultural Preservation in the Vietnamese American Diaspora: The Tradition of Vietnamese Culture Night in Southern California
- Videos:
 - Fit to be Queen, timestamp 0:00–3:25

Lesson Objective: Students will analyze different Vietnamese youth organizations centered around cultural preservation and create a fictional Vietnamese American event to illustrate their takeaways.

Ethnic Studies Theme: This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *community and solidarity* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students analyze community resistance and alliances between communities, as well as the complexities within these experiences. Students explore the important role students clubs and organizations, such as VSAs, play in cultural preservation and youth empowerment.

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 *historical perspectives*, one of Seixas' historical thinking skills (Seixas & Morton, 2013). To demonstrate the use of evidence to write historical fiction that accurately conveys the beliefs, values, and motivations of historical actors. Students consider how an ocean of difference can lie between current world views (beliefs, values, and motivations) and those of earlier periods of history.

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Lesson Assessment: Students will craft a poster detailing an imaginative Vietnamese Culture Night or beauty pageant program that holistically reflects what it means to be Vietnamese American. Their poster should have a thematic focus (suffering, hope, equity, love, etc.) and display the different Vietnamese cultural elements that will be incorporated into the show (lion dancing, ao dai fashion show, acting, singing, etc.) Alternatively, students can create a social media post to highlight their imaginative cultural event.

Suggested Amount of Time: 70–90 minutes

Lesson Background:

Vietnamese youth groups, particularly Vietnamese Student Associations (VSAs), play a crucial role in cultural preservation through various activities. Other youth groups include Vietnamese boy/girl scouts, lion dancing groups, and much more. One of the most prominent is

the annual Vietnamese Cultural Nights (VCNs), which are semi-professional performing arts productions. These events showcase a rich tapestry of cultural elements, including lion dancing, singing, acting, traditional and contemporary dancing, and performances with traditional instruments. VCNs are similar to "Paris by Night" (Thúy Nga), a well-known performing arts production in the Vietnamese diaspora. In addition to these vibrant cultural showcases, VSAs engage in community service, collaborating with other student organizations and local community members. They also host discussion nights focused on Vietnamese history, such as the Fall of Saigon, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their heritage.

- Key Vocabulary:
 - Diaspora - A group of people who have been scattered from their homeland
 - Áo Dài - Long flowing dress worn over long pants (typically white)

Lesson Procedures:

- a. Cultural Energizer (five minutes)
 - i. Prompt students to think about examples of cultural preservation in their culture. Examples may include cultural festivals and events, religious worship ceremonies or sites, artwork, etc.
 - ii. Allow for a whole class share out.
- b. Lesson Introduction (5–10 minutes)
 - i. Teacher shows students the following images and prompts them with the following: See-Think-Wonder: Helping them See (observe), Think (make inferences with reasoning), and Wonder (ask questions)
 1. Image 1: Áo dài (traditional long dress), Nón Lá (Straw conical hats), Vietnamese umbrella
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/485sh8bx93ct95w97m5os9ajk8y1lvnt>
 - a. Original source:
https://sundial.csun.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MG_5672-1170x780.jpg
 2. Image 2: Traditional style Viet pajamas
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/7q5p5zub71k50jqht9srcdfnmc24ivxn>
 - a. Original source:
<https://wp.dailybruin.com/images/2014/01/d4872979-ee43-4ccd-8de5-143fdd770c93.jpg>

3. Image 3:
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/987ammm0na4344mec78g8em4z9mgjsw3>
 - a. Lion dancing attire on the right
 4. Display this image -
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/0v7lx1qc17jiir8n3s06hgx4esgu8ox>
 - a. Original source:
https://uscvsawebly.com/uploads/1/2/0/7/120797869/50094232-10156138994776045-5721452799745589248-o_orig.jpg
 - ii. Introduce lesson questions and background to students.
- c. Interaction with first source: What are Vietnamese Student Associations (VSA)? (15 minutes)
- i. Provide the following passage about Vietnamese Student Associations (VSAs) to students. Ask them to think about the following prompts: What VSA's are, their role in cultural preservation, and other Vietnamese youth organizations?
 - ii. Excerpt about VSA's: "A similar movement was happening at universities all over the United States. Vietnamese Student Association clubs were springing up left and right, in places like Orange County, California — which is now home to the largest population of Vietnamese people outside Vietnam — but also states as far as Virginia (est. 1979) and Illinois (est. 1983). Today, over 100 active collegiate VSAs exist all over the country, most operating under the mission statement of forming Vietnamese American community and preserving Vietnamese culture. The network of clubs has grown so much over the past forty years that alliances now exist in every region of the United States. The 11 regional alliances belong to an all-encompassing North American union called the Union of North American Vietnamese Student Associations (UNAVSA), which oversees national activities and hosts an annual philanthropy program that has raised over \$300,000 for Vietnamese causes in the last seven years. In the United States, no other ethnic group has developed a collegiate organization network as robust and nationally connected as the Vietnamese youth community. But in 1977, Bui had no idea that he was part of a trailblazing generation that would lay the foundation for today's far-reaching Vietnamese student community. At the time, he and his peers had a more immediate concern: academic success. To many Vietnamese refugees, the majority of whom had risked their lives as boat people and immigrated to the United States with few belongings or savings, education was seen as an essential step towards establishing themselves in a new country. 'By then, it's not much about how to preserve our culture yet. It's more about how we connect, help each other in the university environment in terms of how to study, share homework with each other — mostly about academics first,' Bui says. 'Because we were so worried we couldn't make it.'" (Tran, 3)
 - iv. After students read the passage above, ask them to reflect on the lesson questions.

This can be written or verbally discussed with a partner or the whole class.

- d. Interaction with second source: Vietnamese Culture Nights (15 minutes)
 - i. Use source “Cultural Preservation in the Vietnamese American Diaspora: The Tradition of Vietnamese Culture Night in Southern California” by Sheila Trần as the anchor text.
 - ii. The main webpage (<https://raabwritingfellows.com/2020/sheila-tran/>) will provide an overview, and the linked document will provide a more details history of Vietnamese Student Associations and Vietnamese Culture Nights: (https://raabwritingfellows.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Sheila-Tran_-Raab-Project-Description-Excerpt-1.pdf)
 - iii. Optional for teachers to include. This excerpt will provide additional context about Vietnamese Culture Nights (VCN).
 1. Excerpt about VCN: “Despite their regional differences, nearly all VSAs have one thing in common: the use of performance and storytelling to build community and celebrate culture. The biggest annual event hosted by these clubs is Vietnamese Culture Night (VCN) — called “Culture Show” in Northern California or other variants outside of Southern California — an entirely student-run performing arts show taking place over a single night that celebrates and discusses Vietnamese cultural identity. The first known iterations began in the mid-to-late 1970s at California universities, and the tradition has since spread to nearly all Northern American VSAs. My research primarily focuses on the history and evolution of the show in Southern California, although the show’s history varies by region. A modern-day VCN can range from 2-3 hours in length and consists of a play interspersed with performances such as Vietnamese traditional dances, lion dance, choir performance, spoken word, hip-hop dance, and more. Shows are primarily held in English, but also include a small amount of Vietnamese words and phrases. Today’s shows center around social, cultural, and political topics relevant to the Vietnamese American community, tackling themes such as intergenerational trauma, generational conflict, Vietnam War-related PTSD, mental illness in the Vietnamese community, and much more. For most VSAs, VCN is the most-anticipated event of the year, one that requires months and months of preparation by student performers and organizers who volunteer hours of their time per week for free, many of whom have never performed on stage or organized a stage production before and will never do so again. Unlike a typical play or performance-based show, VCN blends both aspects in a manner that defies convention to any pre-existing Western or Eastern format. It’s a unique and collaborative art form developed by the Vietnamese American student community, sprung out of the need to give a voice to a community in a

country that has historically lacked spaces for Asian American voices — much less spaces developed specifically for and by those communities. The show’s scale has grown exponentially from its humble roots in the student movement. UCLA VSU’s VCN runs on a budget of over \$30,000 each year and draws an audience of over 1,000. UC Berkeley’s VSA sells roughly 1,000 tickets annually and takes place in the university’s prestigious Zellerbach Hall. Today, the shows are still entirely student-run and largely nonprofit. Its organizers, participants, and performers primarily consist of ordinary Vietnamese American college students across diverse disciplines — from the liberal arts to STEM to the creative arts — who have one thing in common: their heritage, and a desire to engage, celebrate, and challenge it” (Tran, 4-5).

- v. After interacting with the second source, ask them to reflect on the lesson questions. This can be written or verbally discussed with a partner or the whole class.
- f. Interaction with a third source: Beauty Pageants (15 minutes)
 - i. Teachers can provide the following context about beauty pageants:
 - 1. Excerpt about Beauty Pageants: “What distinguishes a Vietnamese American beauty pageant from all other beauty pageants is its incorporation of the traditional Vietnamese dress called the ao dai into every pageant. The basic ao dai for women is a long flowing dress worn over long full palazzo pants. Although it varies in style, the formal dress most often worn for competition is a form-fitting tunic that slits into front and back panels from slightly above the natural waistline down to below the knees. The ao dai was originally worn by royalty, but by the early twentieth century it became a fashionable clothing item for the modern Vietnamese woman. Because the garment is difficult to work in, middle-class women and adolescent schoolgirls most commonly wore it. Others, including men, only wore ao dai on holidays and special occasions...Vietnamese ao dai beauty pageants are one of the most visible examples of Vietnamese immigrants trying to negotiate the process of assimilating into bourgeois American culture while remaining ethnically Vietnamese. These pageants have become permanent fixtures in Vietnamese American festivals and celebrations since the late 1970s. Their cultural origins, however, are not from Vietnam. Rather, they are an invented cultural tradition created by Vietnamese immigrants in the United States. Beauty pageants in Vietnam tend to place emphasis on a woman's physical appearance. Vietnamese American ao dai pageants, however, recognize the overall beauty of young women. This includes her public speaking skills, her appearance and gait in ao dai, and most importantly, her ability to retain her ethnic and cultural heritage. Unlike the beauty pageants that take place in Vietnam, Vietnamese Americans celebrate their

cultural difference as immigrants in a collective effort to preserve ‘Vietnamese culture and tradition through beauty pageants’” (Nguyễn, 2-3)

- ii. Play an excerpt (0:00 – 3:25) of this video (Fit to be Queen) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yzjUw4eSwQ>
 - iii. After interacting with the second source, ask them to reflect on the lesson questions. This can be written or verbally discussed with a partner/whole class.
- g. Cultural Production: Poster (25–30 minutes)
- i. Divide students up into groups of four. Have them brainstorm and collaborate in the construction of a poster detailing an imaginative Vietnamese Culture Night, beauty pageant program, or cultural event that holistically illustrates what it means to be Vietnamese American. Alternatively, students can create a social media post to advertise for the imaginative cultural event.
 1. Their poster should have a thematic focus (suffering, hope, equity, love, etc.) and display the different Vietnamese cultural elements that will be incorporated into the show. If time permits, teachers can also assign students to create a publicity video for their imaginative cultural event.
 2. Consider searching up past VCN shows to project as an exemplar or source of inspiration.
- h. Share Time - Gallery Walk (10 minutes)
- i. Students will do a gallery walk to view and learn from other groups.
 - ii. Two people from each group will tour the entire classroom and see what other students have constructed.
 - iii. Two people from each group will stay behind and present their poster to tourists. Switch after a designated amount of time. Consider providing a note-taker for students as they are touring the posters.
- i. Reflection - Have students choose one of the three lesson questions to respond to. Optional: Allow students to share their favorite posters and nominate exemplary works.

Scaffolding:

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
 - Create cooperative learning groups with clear goals, roles, and responsibilities

- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
 - For difficult and longer texts, extract smaller and significant portions for student reading
 - Provide written transcripts for videos or auditory clips
 - Have a word wall displaying definitions for repeating difficult vocabulary such as diaspora or *ao dai*
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
 - Compose in multiple media such as text, speech, drawing, illustration, design, film, music, dance/movement, visual art, sculpture or video
 - Provide differentiated models to emulate (i.e. models that demonstrate the same outcomes but use differing approaches, strategies, skills, etc.)

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:
 - Listening: Use visuals to accompany printed text whenever possible
 - Five pictures depicting key important events in the story are used as visual cues to retell a familiar story
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
 - Listening: Check comprehension of all students frequently
 - Teacher paraphrases student responses as they explain their thinking in effort to validate content learning and encourage the use of precise language.
- **Bridging:** Consider the following method to support with bridging students:
 - Listening: Confirm students' prior knowledge of content topics
 - With a focus on meaning-making, students are prompted to think about what they already know in effort to help them learn something new.
 - Students find connections between familiar vocabulary related to content learning, explaining how their words are connected. (Our words are connected/linked/related because ...)

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-toolkkit/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. Additional assessment questions:
 - Are VSA's meant for Viet Americans or for non-Viet Americans?
 - Are VSA's exclusive because they are only located on college campuses?
 - Are Vietnamese beauty pageants inclusive? If so, how? If not, how can they be adapted to be so?
 - How do youth organizations simultaneously preserve traditions and culture while also adapting with contemporary movements?
2. Culture Club Creation - Have students consider other club organizations that are culture based, and whether these official groups exist on their campus or not. If not, have students curate and suggest a cultural-based group to be founded and formed on their campus. The organization can be of any culture and ask students to consider factors such as: club purpose, philosophy, events, etc. This supports student civic engagement with their community and can have profound impacts on their school climate and culture.
3. Exploring Youth Groups - Have students research these other organizations that preserve Vietnamese culture and heritage: Lac Hong Performing Arts, lion dancing troops, VAALA, scout groups, and more.
4. Oral History - Students can listen to the oral history of Thanh Tâm Trần (0:00 - 6:10) and discuss how this depicts one of many narratives of being a Vietnamese American youth growing up in the United States.
(<https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/81235/d8qg3d/?order=0>)

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