

Hmong History & Cultural Studies Model Curriculum
California Department of Education
The Hmong and the Secret War in Laos
Grade(s): 10–12

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Area of Study: Hmong Histories

Compelling Question: How do displacement and war shape Hmong histories and migration?

Lesson Questions (Supporting Questions):

- What is the Secret War in Laos?
- What role did the Hmong play in the Secret War?
- What effects did the Secret War have on the Hmong people in Laos during the Vietnam Civil War?

Lesson Materials:

- **Supplies:**
 - Access to laptop devices
 - Teacher slidedeck (optional)
 - Writing utensils (paper/pencil or GoogleDoc)
 - Political cartoon "--And, of course, if Cambodia fell, then Laos would fall, and if Laos fell" / Marlette. from Library of Congress
 - Newspaper image from Library of Congress
 - Map of the secret US bombings in Laos from Legacies Library
 - Additional materials will vary depending on students' choice of assessment
- **Readings:**
 - Vang Pao's quote (available in procedures)
 - CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974 *Supporting the "Secret War" - the following sections only:*
 - "Concern About Laos"
 - "Supporting the Anti-Communists"
 - "The PARU Program"
 - "Enter Vang Pao"
- **Videos:**
 - *10thirtysix | Exclusive | The Secret War: Hmong Soldiers Who Served Alongside Americans in Vietnam* on YouTube

- *The Child Soldiers of Vang Pao's Army* on YouTube

- **Handout:**

- Key Terms & Historical Figures
- Link to handout:
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ovaayrus5b68mwwywg9a7px17mhiq27>

Lesson Objective: After students learn about what the Cold War is and how it was carried out in Southeast Asia through the Vietnam War, students will analyze the Secret War that took place in Laos, the role that Hmong played, and the impact it had on Hmong people.

Historical Thinking Skill:

This lesson will facilitate student proficiency in *cause and consequence* one of Seixas' historical thinking skills (Seixas & Morton, 2013). To help students to understand that there are short-term and long-term consequences of events. Students consider that change is driven by multiple causes, and results in multiple consequences. These create a complex web of interrelated short-term and long-term causes and consequences. Educators may enhance this lesson by having students explore the intergenerational trauma of the Vietnam War on Southeast Asian communities.

Standards Addressed:

HSS-10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.

HSS-11.9.3 Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War and containment policy, including the following: the Vietnam War.

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.11–12.1 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

Lesson Assessment:

Students will choose one of the following options to demonstrate their understanding of the Secret War (*instructions for each choice are included in the lesson procedures*):

- By the numbers
- Infographic events
- News report (radio or tv)
- Interview someone from the Hmong community or watch/listen to a Hmong oral history interview
- Collage of photos of the Secret War

- Letter to a Hmong veteran
- Write a Congressional Resolution

Suggested Amount of Time: 100–110 minutes

Lesson Background:

The Secret War in Laos is not often taught in US History, but needs to be recognized. It is connected to the Cold War through the Vietnam War, and it was conducted and led through the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although the US did not send ground troops, the US was intricately involved by providing funding, military weapons, and uniforms to those willing to fight the communists. Among those willing to fight the communists were the Hmong. The CIA operative Bill Lair contacted Vang Pao, a Hmong general and worked out an agreement whereby Vang Pao would recruit Hmong soldiers, and the CIA would provide the uniforms, weapons, and training. Over 30,000 Hmong soldiers were recruited—some as young as 11-years-old. They rescued downed American pilots, protected their territory and fought the communists. Some were trained to fly planes to run bombing missions to bomb out the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Source: CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955–1974 *Supporting the "Secret War"*

This lesson contains sensitive content that may be sensitive for some students. Teachers should exercise discretion in evaluating whether the resources are suitable for their class and provide a sensitive content warning to their students at the beginning of each day of the lesson. Teachers may wish to consult *An Introduction to Content Warnings and Triggers* from the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/xlvmv9s8yz7q0p3g5kfg4cklkyj971th>.

Lesson Procedures:

1. Warm up Question
 - a. Ask students: What do you think of when you hear ‘Secret War’? What do you think this suggests?
 - i. Allow students to pair-share their thoughts
 - b. Inform students that they will be learning about a Secret War in Laos today.
 - i. Teachers can utilize the lesson background to frontload students with information.
2. Optional Vocabulary Building (*for use during or after presentation*)
 - a. Provide the following Key Terms and Historical Figures list (see handout) digitally or as a physical copy.
 - i. Review the list with students

- b. Options for engaging with vocabulary:
 - i. Encourage students to create a Frayer model vocabulary box for one big concept like Secret Army, refugee, evacuation, or Yellow Rain.
 - ii. Have students create visual representation for one term.
 - iii. Have students write why a term is important after the reading.
3. Shared Learning: Presentation
- a. Use the recommended slide texts below to create a slidedeck or teachers may access the lesson slidedeck here and modify as needed:
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/0bltq19rerauxx4kvhnwsyj72rp1i4ne>.

Students should follow along with a notetaker of the teacher's choice. Use the five E's (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate) to facilitate the presentation. (*Teacher Notes for PPT on the Secret War will be italicized.*)
 - i. You may also consider printing out readings/slidedeck and utilizing the Mark the Text strategy.
 - ii. For students that need reading assistance and/or translation, use a text reader, such as Immersive Reader or Snap and Read.
 - iii. For students with auditory processing needs, be sure to include captions when playing videos.
 - iv. For language learners, you may consider playing the lesson videos utilizing captions in the student(s) heritage language or have students individually play the video in class utilizing heritage language captions in classes with more than one heritage language present.
 - v. For students needing writing and discussion support, provide students with a handout of sentence stems/frames.
 - b. Engage (Slide 2): Ask students to analyze the political cartoon and 'See, Think, Wonder' (Source: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2008677233/>).
 - i. Who are the two people on the other side of the gate? *A general and President Nixon.*
 - ii. What do the gravestones represent? *Southeast Asian countries connected to Vietnam.*

- iii. What is meant by the quote “..and then if Cambodia fell, then Laos would fall, and if Laos fell, then...”? *If Cambodia falls to communism, then Laos will and then South Vietnam will, this is the Domino Theory*
 - iv. What is meant by the sign on the gate “Viet War Dead”? *The US will lose South Vietnam to communism if something is not done about Cambodia and Laos.*
 - v. Teacher Note: *By the end of the discussion, students should know about the Domino Theory and why the US is interested in entering into the Civil War in Laos.*
- c. Explain (Slides 3 & 4) Video - Have students watch the video *10thirtysix | Exclusive | The Secret War: Hmong Soldiers Who Served Alongside Americans in Vietnam* (16 minutes) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_0WbPq2lhs).
- i. For this slide, have students engage in the thinking activity: TQE (Thoughts, Questions and Epiphanies).
 - ii. Teacher Notes: Important facts from the video:
 1. *Chue Her, a Secret War Soldier describes his experience in a reeducation camp*
 2. *Thai Vue describes his near death experience being attacked by the Laotian communist soldiers and his escape across the Mekong River to the Thai Refugee Camp*
 3. *Hmong young men and then boys, joined as foot soldiers to fight the communists in Laos and then in Vietnam*
 4. *CIA agent Bill Lair recruited General Vang Pao who was Hmong*
 5. *General Vang Pao recruited 1000s of Hmong men and boys, Boys as young as 11-years-old*
 6. *In return Hmong received rice and humanitarian aid*
 7. *Hmong soldiers served as the role of what US soldiers would do if they were sent to Laos. They rescued US fighter pilots who were shot down.*
 8. *Dr. Chia Vang, scholar and professor author of the book “Hmong America,” describes her escape through the jungle as a child with their family to a Thai Refugee camp. “We, the Hmong have a very unique experience in that we were caught in global confrontations.*

We had a unique situation because of Laos' neutrality, without the Hmong, many American lives wouldn't have been saved, they helped save downed American pilots. And we were the foot soldiers so that 40,000 American soldiers didn't have to go to Laos."

9. *After the US left in 1973 and after the Fall of Saigon, the Hmong were left to fight for themselves against the communists.*
10. *Evacuation for the Hmong was not planned or organized, the few who made it on the few planes that left Laos had to fight their way among 1000s of people running after the plane.*
11. *The Hmong soldiers who fought for the US in Laos are not officially recognized as Vietnam War Vets, so they do not qualify for any veteran benefits.*
12. *In spite of no recognition, both interviewees, Chue Her and Thai Vue are happy to be in the US where they can live their lives freely.*

d. Explain (Slide 5) Primary Resource Analysis - CIA Document

(<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/12vis770g3614ey24r56cb8zjq6wit8>)

- i. *How does activity in Laos connect to the Domino theory? According to the Truman Doctrine, when one nation falls to communism the next one will fall as well is the Domino Theory. President Kennedy feared that if Laos were to fall to the communist, then South Vietnam would be next. At the time of the Vietnam War, Laos was being ruled by a coalition government of the Pathet Lao (pro-communist), the neutralists and the Royal Government (anti-communists supported by the US).*
- ii. *What was guaranteed to Laos in the Geneva Accords? Under the Geneva Accords, which was an agreement signed by 14 nations in 1954, Laos would be guaranteed neutrality (and be allowed to stay out of any conflict within Vietnam)*
- iii. *What decision did President Kennedy make in 1961? President Kennedy decided not to send in any US troops to support the Royal Laotian government in 1961. And this article implies that President Kennedy, in 1963, is still intent on not sending in US troops.*
- iv. *Why did the US recruit the Hmong people to fight in the Secret War in Laos? Since it looked like northern Laos was going to fall to communism because the Pathet Lao was attacking them, and President Eisenhower has promised the American people he would not send US soldiers into Laos and Laos was guaranteed neutrality, the president may have felt that there*

was a need to hire the Hmong to fight the war for the US on the ground level (Inference)

- v. How did the CIA recruit the Hmong to fight the communist in Laos? *The CIA operative Bill Lair worked with Hmong General Vang Pao, educated in Northern Laos, on an agreement to recruit Hmong as soldiers to fight the communists. For the Hmong, in Northern Laos, they felt they were going to be attacked by the Laotians, so they agreed because the US CIA provided them with weapons, uniforms and rice. They were supplied with weapons that had been left over from WWII. The Hmong were also trained to fly fighter planes to drop bombs where the Ho Chi Minh Trail was thought to have been. The Hmong soldiers also rescued US pilots from downed planes. At first 1,000 men were recruited, then 4,000, then 10,000. Radios were used as a way to convince the Hmong that communism was bad. Hmong males as young as 11 were recruited to fight as soldiers, some too small to hold the M-16s they were given.*
- e. Explain (Slides 6 & 7) Primary Resource Analysis - Vang Pao Quote
 "As a young man, he had fought against the Japanese during World War II, and with the French against the North Vietnamese in the 1950s. He led a CIA-sponsored secret war in Laos during the Vietnam War and, when it was lost, led many of his people into exile. Former Central Intelligence Agency chief William Colby once called [Vang] 'the biggest hero of the Vietnam War'."
 (Source: BBC)

When asked how the Americans contacted him, Vang Pao describes...

- i. *They never came to make this agreement or that agreement. They just came looking around, They saw the Hmong were very poor in many ways- no salt to eat... no clothes to wear, so when Americans came, they said, "Do you want salt for the Hmong?" So Americans dropped salt everywhere for the Hmong. And when the winter came and it was very cold, the Americans asked, "Do you need clothes for the Hmong?" The Hmong are very poor, so they dropped clothes from the sky for the Hmong... Then one day they brought carbines... And then they brought in... communication radios and gave one to each Hmong chief. At that time we already had communication everywhere. So slowly, slowly, that's how we did it... All they did was say, "Do you need this? Do you need that?" Yes, we needed this, we needed that, we were very poor... So when the war came, they asked for our help, and we helped... [T]he king also gave his consent. So that's why I helped the Americans." (Source: Hillmer, P. (2015). A people's history of the Hmong. Minnesota Historical Society.)*
- ii. Based on Vang Pao's quote, what enticed the Hmong to become soldiers and join the Secret War? *He describes the Hmong as being poor, so*

clothes, salt, food and radios seemed very enticing for a poor agrarian community.

- f. (Slides 8 & 9) Video - Have students watch *The Child Soldiers of Vang Pao's Army* video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBeOzheWskY>) (4 minutes) and engage in the thinking activity: TQE (Thoughts, Questions and Epiphanies) about the video.
 - i. Debrief as a class.
- g. (Slide 10) Have students read the following sections of “CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974” in *Supporting the "Secret War"* by William M. Leary (<https://web.archive.org/web/20201116105808/https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art7.html>) (In the slide, click on the Library of Congress image to access the article from the CIA website).
 - i. Have students read it silently or in pairs. Then answer the questions in the green and white boxes.
 - 1. Concern About Laos
 - 2. Supporting the Anti-Communists
 - 3. The PARU Program
 - 4. Enter Vang Pao
 - ii. Why did the US recruit the Hmong people to fight in the Secret War in Laos? *According to the Geneva Convention, the US was not allowed to intervene in Laos as they were considered neutral. So in essence the US did not intervene because the US did not use any US soldiers to fight on the ground in Laos. Instead they sent in CIA operatives to recruit Hmong soldiers to fight for the US. These Hmong soldiers fought in the name of the US against the Viet Cong - North Vietnam Communist soldiers.*
 - iii. How did the Secret War take place? *The Secret War took place in which the Hmong soldiers fought the North Vietnamese Communist in Laos, bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, rescuing US fighter pilots, and fighting the Laotian communists. US fighter planes dropped This was done without US Congressional approval and without knowledge from the American people.*
- h. (Slide 11) Analyze the map of the secret US bombings in Laos and read through the facts from Legacies Library (<https://legaciesofwar.org/about-laos/secret-war-laos/>).

- i. (Slide 12) Answer the following question:
 - i. What do you notice about where the US dropped bombs in Laos? *Possible answers. Along the border with Vietnam at first but later, throughout Laos.*
 - ii. How do you think the bombing impacted the Hmong population in Laos? *Possible answers. Laos is the most bombed country in the world, the majority of the Laotian population including the Hmong were affected in devastating ways. The loss of life, the loss of their way of life, the loss of their homeland, all created a destabilizing feeling and trauma within the Hmong and Laotian population. Still today there are undetonated bombs in Laos.*
 - j. (Slide 13) Teachers post up a position on a spectrum with one end Strongly Agree and the other end Strongly Disagree regarding the statement(s): “The US actions during the 1960s fell in line with the Geneva Accords” or any other provocative statement.
 - i. Slidedeck can contain sentence frames for sharing ‘how to agree/disagree.’
 - ii. Students go to a position and discuss with a peer.
 1. Students are able to change their position after the share out.
4. (Slide 14) Assessment Options: Menu Board
- a. By The Numbers (soldiers, bombs, years, etc)
 - i. Students will utilize the numbers in the content of the presentation and resources to create a creative display of the numbers of details of the Secret War.
 - b. Infographic of major events
 - i. Have students choose four pivotal events that makeup the Secret War and create an infographic.
 - ii. The infographic should include: event names, descriptions, images, captions, statistics, text, etc.
 - c. News report (radio or tv) recorded on Flipgrid (or other recording application)
 - i. Students should first submit a storyboard submission of their speaking parts.

- ii. Students can also take on the role of a news investigative reporter who exposes the Secret War in 1973.
 - d. Interview someone from the Hmong community
 - i. Alternatively, students can watch/listen to a Hmong oral history interview (https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/hmong-studies_hohp/).
 - ii. Students will share their takeaways from the interview/oral history by creating a written reflection. This can also be done as a reflective poem.
 - e. Collage of photos of the Secret War and important facts coming out about the Secret War in Laos.
 - f. Letter to a Hmong veteran
 - i. Suggested content: Empathy for their suffering and lack of recognition for their sacrifice.
 - g. Write a formal Congressional Resolution
 - i. Suggested content: Recognize and/or apologize to the Hmong veterans for their contributions to the US War efforts during the Secret War in Laos.
5. Sharing and Reflection
 - a. Allow students to share their final assessment through one of the following options: Gallery Walk, Give One/Get One, Video Reflection, Lines of Communication, or Small Group/Whole Class Presentation.

Scaffolding:

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
 - Create an accepting and supportive classroom climate
 - Invite personal response, evaluation and self-reflection to content and activities
- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
 - Use cues and prompts to draw attention to critical features
 - For students of various reading levels, utilize a text leveler, such as *Diffit* <https://beta.diffit.me/#topic>, to level text and identify vocabulary to pre-teach.

- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
 - Embed prompts to show and explain your work (e.g., portfolio review, art critiques)

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: Provide sentence frames with word and picture banks
 - In response to a prompt, the teacher offers a sentence frame orally and/or in writing to support expression of student thinking. Frames are adjusted based upon specific grammatical structure, key vocabulary, content learning, and language proficiency level descriptors, etc. Frames are a temporary scaffold that require modification.
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
 - Writing: Provide writing frames
 - In response to a prompt, the teacher offers a sentence frame orally and/or in writing to support expression of student thinking. Frames are adjusted based upon specific grammatical structure, key vocabulary, content learning, and language proficiency level descriptors, etc. Frames are a temporary scaffold that require modification.
- **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-toolkit/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. If teachers have time, jigsaw the article “CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974 *Supporting the ‘Secret War’*” by William M. Leary with students as it is a lengthy 31 page article but with important information on the Secret War
(<https://web.archive.org/web/20201116105808/https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art7.html>).
2. *Teachers can pick and choose the following additional questions to address:*

Background questions that students should know before the lesson:

1. Who are the Hmong?
2. What was the Vietnam Civil War about?
3. Why did the US get involved and to what extent did the US get involved?
4. Why did the U.S. violate the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and begin secretly launching a war in Laos?

Questions students should be able to answer during the lesson:

5. What was the Secret War in Laos?
6. Map out the facts and timeline of US involvement in Laos.
7. How did the Hmong people get involved in the Secret War?
8. What role did the Hmong play in the Secret War?
9. How was the Secret War conducted utilizing the Hmong soldiers?
10. What happened to most of the Hmong soldiers and their families after the US left Laos, and after the Fall of Saigon?
11. Were the Hmong soldiers given recognition for their role in fighting for the U.S. in the Secret War? Why or why not?

12. Bob Curry, a Vietnam Vet asked Hmong refugee men who were soldiers “How could you stand before the American Flag and cry and be proud after what the US government did to you?” What did he mean? What did the US government do to the Hmong soldiers and their families?
13. What does it mean to be a global participatory democracy?
14. What is the role of truth and transparency in foreign policy?

Open-ended questions to discuss at the end of the lesson

15. What role did the Cold War play in creating Hmong refugees?
16. Should governments launch secret wars?
17. What effects did the Secret War have on the Hmong people in Laos during the Vietnam Civil War?
18. How can we prevent secret conflicts in the future?

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