Australia and the Vietnam War
## Contents

### Introduction for teachers

**Using Australia and the Vietnam War in the classroom**
- Overview
- Integrated Learning Activities Guide
- Curriculum Guide
- The Learning Characteristics of the Process of Historical Inquiry
- Resource Guide

### Introductory Activity

**Would you go to war?**

### TOPIC 1

**Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War**

Focus Questions:
- What was the Vietnam War?
- Why did Australia become involved?
- Was this a popular decision?
- What was the nature of the Australian involvement?

### TOPIC 2

**Life in Vietnam**

Focus Questions:
- What was life like for the Vietnamese?
- Who were the Allies?
- Who were the enemy?
- What was life like for the Australian soldiers in Vietnam?

### TOPIC 3

**The experience of battle**

Focus Questions:
- What was the nature of the Australians’ combat tactics?
- What was it like to be in combat?

### TOPIC 4

**Reporting and representing the war**

Focus Questions:
- How was the Vietnam War reported to Australians?
- What impact did TV reporting have on people?

### TOPIC 5

**On the home front**

Focus Questions:
- How did the system of national service work?
- Did people support or oppose it?
- Did people support or oppose the war?

### TOPIC 6

**Going home**

Focus Questions:
- What happened in Vietnam after the Australians left?
- How were the veterans received back into Australian society?

### TOPIC 7

**After the war**

Focus Questions:
- What has happened to Australian veterans since the war?
- What has been the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia?

### TOPIC 8

**Commemoration**

Focus Questions:
- How has the Vietnam War been commemorated in Australia?
- What is its meaning for you today?
Introduction for teachers

Using *Australia and the Vietnam War* in the classroom

The resource

*Australia and the Vietnam War* has been produced by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs as part of the Australian Government’s Commemorations program, *Saluting Their Service*.

Educational aim

The aim of this education resource is to provide teachers and students with self-contained classroom-ready materials and teaching strategies to explore the experiences of Australians and the Vietnam War. It provides a rich collection of information and evidence for developing students’ knowledge and ideas about those experiences, and encourages students to talk to people in their own communities who lived through the period.

Commemoration


The war led to significant political and social division in Australia, and the greatest involvement in public protests since the conscription debates of 1916–1917.

It is important that young people are aware of the nature and significance of this part of Australia’s wartime history. This education resource has been created to achieve that in Australian schools during 2007 and beyond.

Components

This resource comprises three elements:

- a **Teachers’ Guidebook**, with classroom-ready documents and questions, and suggested teaching strategies for eight key aspects of the Australian Vietnam War experience;
- a **CD-ROM** containing image and film libraries to complement the print resources for each of the topics, and interactive activities for students to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the war; and
- a **DVD** of Episode 7 (*The Vietnam War*) of the *Australians At War* documentary series.

Each of these components can be used separately, or in an integrated way as suggested in each of the topics in the Teachers’ Guidebook.

Eight topics

The eight topics covered provide students with resources for studying major aspects of the Australian experience of the Vietnam War — military, political and home front, and the continuing impacts of the war on the people involved and on Australian society.

*For teachers,* each topic starts with a **brief historical overview** to make sure that they feel confident with their own knowledge of the major content. There is also a **set of suggested teaching strategies** for using the materials at the major year levels, and **reproducible information and evidence pages** that include key questions and classroom activities. There are also suggestions for **integrating the print, CD-ROM and DVD activities** in the classroom. (See pages 6–7 for more detail.)

*For students,* each topic includes **focus questions** that will guide inquiry, **basic information to provide a knowledge framework**, and a variety of **primary source documents** to explore.

Whose war experience?

Australian involvement in the Vietnam War included men from the Navy, and men and women from the Army and the Air Force, as well as several civilian organisations and groups. Some of these were involved in combat against the enemy. Many, particularly those in supply roles, were not. The experience of all these is included in this resource, but the emphasis is on understanding the most dangerous and traumatic experience, that of combat.

The resource also explores the home front experience. Most Australians supported the war for most of its course; some actively opposed the war — most did not. The home front experience also includes that of the families of the servicemen. Students are encouraged to understand this range of experiences and attitudes, and to take them into account in talking to people about their Vietnam War home front experience.

Inquiry methodology

The resource uses an inquiry approach — students are provided with a variety of evidence and information, and they analyse this material to form their own conclusions about the nature of the Australians’ experiences.
Curriculum outcomes

The materials have been shaped around the History/SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment) curricula in all states and territories, with an emphasis on achieving key learning outcomes. A summary of curriculum links to the key learning outcomes for each state and territory can be seen on pages 8–9.

Curriculum levels

The resource has been designed for use with students from middle primary to upper secondary levels, but not all parts are suitable for all levels.

The print materials are most likely to be used with middle to upper secondary students. Where there are activities that are suitable for younger years, these are indicated in the teaching suggestions.

Many of the CD-ROM activities have been specifically designed for younger students.

Interviewing Australians from the period

The resource has been developed to encourage students to interview people in their local community about their memories and experiences of the war, whether as participants in Vietnam, civilians in Australia, or as refugees from Vietnam after the war.

There is a range of other activities that students can undertake while developing their knowledge and understanding of the period — writing letters, making film reports, exploring a Viet Cong tunnel system, interacting with the virtual base at Nui Dat and more — but all are ultimately directed towards helping students engage and empathise with people who lived through this time.

The relevance of history to today

While this resource is about the Australian experience of the Vietnam War, teachers may want to use the insights and understanding that are developed through the historical material to have students think about similar concepts today:

- Why do we go to war?
- Can and should people have an influence on such a decision?
- If war occurs, who should be sent to fight it?
- How do governments influence our attitudes?
- How would we behave in combat?
- What responsibility does society owe to those who go to war?
- What is the place of our military history and heritage in our sense of national identity?

These are all important civic and citizenship concepts that students can explore through an historical frame of reference as provided in this resource.

A search for truth

History is a search for truth — what happened, why, and with what effects and impacts. A study of the Vietnam War raises many difficulties that need to be taken into account:

- The Vietnam War was, and still is for many people, a very important part of their lives. It is central to some people’s sense of personal identity.
- It involves many myths. Some of these can be easily addressed because they are based on inaccuracies; others are more difficult, because they are important to national identity.
- A study involves considering the reliability of memory, and some people may take this as questioning their integrity and honesty.
- It involves looking at human behaviour in time of danger and stress, when both the best and worst aspects of people may appear more starkly than they do in normal life.
- It requires empathy, a difficult quality to develop and apply while at the same time making critical judgements.
- It involves an awareness of complexity, rather than accepting generalisations.

This resource seeks to help students address these challenges, to make their study of the war accessible and engaging, and to help them come to their own conclusions and decisions based on a consideration of fair and representative evidence.

A disclaimer

The inquiry approach which is the guiding methodology of this resource requires students to be exposed to a fair and balanced range of evidence for them to develop their own conclusions. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs cannot be assumed to agree with or endorse any content or opinions expressed in websites or other publications quoted or referred to in this resource.
## Integrated learning activities
Print, CD-ROM and DVD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge and understanding:</th>
<th>Achieved by these elements:</th>
<th>Print activities</th>
<th>CD-ROM activities</th>
<th>DVD resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOPIC 1</strong> Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| • Consider attitudes to involvement in war  
• Locate Vietnam on a map and describe its basic geography and history  
• Understand the ‘domino theory’  
• Consider a variety of reasons for Australian involvement in the war  
• Understand the attitude of supporters and opponents of involvement at the time  
• Decide if the Government was honest in its account of why it participated in the war  
• Understand the nature of Australia’s military commitment to the war | **Activity 1** Would you go to war?  
**Activity 2** Why was Australia involved in the Vietnam War?  
**Activity 3** Did people support Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War?  
**Activity 4** Did the Government tell the truth about Australia’s involvement in the war?  
**Activity 5** What was Australia’s commitment to the war? | Browse the Interactive Maps  
Browse the Interactive Timeline | The Vietnam War Chapter 1 |
| **TOPIC 2** Life in Vietnam | | | | |
| • Understand the geography and basic history of Vietnam  
• Know which countries were involved in the war  
• Understand the nature of the Australian military commitment to Vietnam  
• Empathise with the life of Australian troops in camp | **Activity 1** What was Vietnam like?  
**Activity 2** Why was Vietnam at war?  
**Activity 3** Who was involved in the war?  
**Activity 4** Who were the enemy?  
**Activity 5** What was life like for the Australian soldiers in camp? | Dress a Paper Doll  
Explore the Camp at Nui Dat  
Compile a Photo Album | The Vietnam War Chapter 2 |
| **TOPIC 3** The experience of battle | | | | |
| • Understand how the Australians fought the war  
• Empathise with the situation of servicemen in combat  
• Describe the Battle of Long Tan  
• Appreciate the horrific nature of war  
• Understand the qualities needed by servicemen and women | **Activity 1** What is your image of the war in Vietnam?  
**Activity 2** What was the nature of the Australians’ war in Phuoc Tuy Province?  
**Activity 3** What was combat like for Australian soldiers in Vietnam?  
**Activity 4** What happened at the Battle of Long Tan?  
**Activity 5** How did the medical system work?  
**Activity 6** Interviewing veterans | Prepare for Patrol  
Write a Letter  
Explore a Viet Cong Tunnel | The Vietnam War Chapter 3 |
| **TOPIC 4** Reporting and representing the war | | | | |
| • Appreciate the nature of news gathering and presentation during the war  
• Decide if the idea of Vietnam as a ‘TV war’ is a myth  
• Analyse a series of images as representations of the war  
• Decide if confronting aspects should be accommodated in the official image of the war | **Activity 1** How do you get your news?  
**Activity 2** How was news about the Vietnam War reported?  
**Activity 3** How do we represent the war now? | Produce a TV Report on Long Tan  
Curate an Exhibition | The Vietnam War Chapter 4 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC 5</th>
<th>On the home front</th>
<th>Knowledge and understanding:</th>
<th>Achieved by these elements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify a variety of attitudes and values to the war and conscription debates</td>
<td>Print activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Appreciate that attitudes changed over time for many people</td>
<td>CD-ROM activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Understand the working of the national service system</td>
<td>DVD resource</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Make a judgement about its fairness at the time</td>
<td>Decision about National Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>Did Australians support the Vietnam War?</td>
<td>Compile a Photo Album</td>
<td>The Vietnam War Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>How did the national service system work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td>Did Australians support conscription?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 4</td>
<td>Who supported/opposed the war and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 5</td>
<td>Making sense of the period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 6</td>
<td>Interviewing people about their home front experiences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC 6</th>
<th>Going home</th>
<th>Knowledge and understanding:</th>
<th>Achieved by these elements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Empathise with the veterans’ experience of returning to Australia</td>
<td>Print activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Appreciate the reasons why some had difficulties after Vietnam</td>
<td>CD-ROM activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Devise strategies for dealing with some problems of memory as historical evidence</td>
<td>DVD resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>What happened when the Australians left Vietnam?</td>
<td>Write a Diary Entry</td>
<td>The Vietnam War Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>Would you visit Vietnam today?</td>
<td>Analyse a Vietnam War Roll of Honour</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td>How did soldiers respond to their homecoming?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 4</td>
<td>How do Vietnam veterans assess their service?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 5</td>
<td>Making sense of the period</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 6</td>
<td>Interviewing people about their home front experiences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC 7</th>
<th>After the war</th>
<th>Knowledge and understanding:</th>
<th>Achieved by these elements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Know about a range of health issues for Australian veterans of the Vietnam War</td>
<td>Print activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be aware of and empathise with the problems facing those veterans whose health has suffered as a result of the war</td>
<td>CD-ROM activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Appreciate the nature of Vietnamese migration to Australia after the war</td>
<td>DVD resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>What is the state of the health of Australia’s Vietnam veterans?</td>
<td>Curate an Exhibition</td>
<td>The Vietnam War Chapter 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>What has been the experience of Vietnamese refugees to Australia?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC 8</th>
<th>Commemoration</th>
<th>Knowledge and understanding:</th>
<th>Achieved by these elements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Compare ways in which Australia’s Vietnam War has been commemorated over time</td>
<td>Print activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyse the place of the Vietnam War in the Anzac tradition</td>
<td>CD-ROM activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Determine its meaning for students today</td>
<td>DVD resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>What is commemoration?</td>
<td>Explore the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>How has the Vietnam War been commemorated in Australia over time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td>How would you commemorate the Australian experience of the Vietnam War?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## ACT

### SOSE High School Band

Australia in the 20th Century, exploring an issue in depth by concentrating on turning points that emphasise aspects of change and continuity.

## NSW

### HSIE Stage 3

**Change and continuity**
- Significant events and people in Australian identity
- Principles of Australian democracy

### HISTORY Stage 5

**Topic 5: Australia in the Vietnam War Era**
- How did the Australian government respond to the threat of communism after World War II?
- How did Australia become involved in the Vietnam War?
- How did various groups respond to Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War?
- What was the impact of the war on Australia and/or neighbouring countries?

### MODERN HISTORY Stage 6

Students investigate the key features and issues of the history of Australia 1945–1983.

**Key features and issues include:**
- The Menzies era – conservatism in a changing world:
  - Fear of communism
  - Reaction to the Vietnam War and development of popular protest movements

## NT

### SOSE Band 4

**Soc 4.1 Time, Continuity and Change**

Analyze significant ideas, people and movements that have shaped societies

### SOSE Band 5

**Soc 5.1 Time, Continuity and Change**

Analyze how past forces and events have shaped contemporary communities

**Soc 5.1+ Time, Continuity and Change**

Analyze and critically evaluate how the context of historical movements and events change; influences and impact on national and global interpretations of history

### HISTORY Stage 2

**Depth Study — Topic 8 Remembering Australians in Wartime: Experiences and Myths, 1880 to the Present.** Students select one or more wars or conflicts in which Australia was involved.
- The motivations of Australian people in supporting, and in opposing, Australia’s involvement in wars or conflicts
- War memorials, commemorative ceremonies, and creative works (eg art, literature, songs, photographs, and film) as ways of remembering Australians involved in wars or conflicts
- Changes in Australian society that resulted from Australia’s participation in wars or conflicts
- Australian people’s experiences overseas and in Australia during times of war or conflict

## QLD

### SOSE Level 5

**TCC 5.4** Students explain the consequences of Australia’s international relations on the development of a cohesive society

### SOSE Level 6

**TCC 6.5** Students develop criteria-based judgments about the ethical behaviour of people in the past

**H5.4** Students present a diagrammatic overview to summarise the short- and long-term effects of a particular event on a population including war, poverty, introduction of new industries, or exploitation of children
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODERN HISTORY 11-12</th>
<th>Theme 1 — Studies of conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SA</strong></td>
<td><strong>SOSE Standard 5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY Stage 2</strong></td>
<td>5.1 Critically analyses different interpretations of events, ideas and issues, including an understanding of the relationship between power and historical representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ESSENTIAL LEARNINGS Standard 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESSENTIAL LEARNINGS Standard 5</strong></td>
<td>Social Responsibility — Understanding the past and creating preferred futures:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUSTRALIAN STUDIES 11-12</strong></td>
<td>• Understands how to evaluate evidence, viewpoints and decisions through investigating past, present and future contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VIC</strong></td>
<td><strong>HISTORY Level 6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUSTRALIAN HISTORY VCE UNIT 3-4</strong></td>
<td>• Continuing significance of major events shaping society (eg Vietnam War)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WA</strong></td>
<td><strong>SOSE 6-10</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY 12</strong></td>
<td>Time, Continuity and Change Outcomes. Students should be taught:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century: Shaping a Nation</strong></td>
<td>• that past people, events and ideas can be sequenced; that change, continuity and heritage are features of all societies; there are different interpretations of historical evidence which influence individual perspectives (world views)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Areas of study:</strong></td>
<td>• that historical time periods have characteristic features; that people, events and ideas are linked; change and continuity have positive and negative impacts; there are different perspectives of people, events and ideas, each supported by historical evidence; that interpretation is influenced by personal and societal beliefs and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students will develop the following key understandings with detailed investigation of at least one of the areas of study above.</strong></td>
<td>• that trends and movements in history can be identified; that people, events and ideas are interrelated and can be compared and contrasted across time periods and cultures; change is viewed differently by particular individuals, groups or nations; that interpretations of historical evidence can be challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Australian identity reflects the changing nature of its society</strong></td>
<td>20th Century: Shaping a Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2 Australia has been affected by its international relations</strong></td>
<td>1.1 Australian identity reflects the changing nature of its society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.4 Australia has been affected by political events, crises and developments</strong></td>
<td>1.2 Australia has been affected by its international relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.5 Australia has been influenced by the social and cultural experiences of its people</strong></td>
<td>1.4 Australia has been affected by political events, crises and developments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further Resources

There is a large and growing collection of materials on Vietnam. These are some that teachers and students will find most useful.

**Official histories of Australian involvement in South-east Asian conflicts 1948–1975**


**Histories of Australia in the Vietnam War (military and home front)**


Terry Burstall, *Vietnam The Australian Dilemma*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1993


John Moremon (ed), *Vietnam Our War — Our Peace*, Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Canberra, 2006


George Odgers, *100 Years of Australians at War*, Lansdowne, Sydney, 1999


**Novels**

David Alexander, *When The Buffalo Fight*, Hutchinson of Australia, Melbourne, 1980


**Long Tan and Coral/Balmoral**


**Oral history collections**

Michael Caulfield (ed), *Voices of War*, Hodder, Sydney, 2006


Photographic collections
Shaune Lakin, Contact – Photographs from the Australian War Memorial Collection, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2006
Gary McKay and Elizabeth Stewart, Vietnam Shots, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2002

Memoirs and Reminiscences
Terry Burstall, A Soldier Returns, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1990
Tim Bowden, One Crowded Hour, Collins Publishers Australia, Sydney, 1987
Bob Buick with Gary McKay, All Guts and No Glory, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000
J F Cairns, Silence Kills, The Vietnam Moratorium Committee, Melbourne, 1970
Barrie Crowley, View From a Low Bough, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997
Jean Debelle Lamensdorf, Write Home For Me, Random House Australia, Sydney, 2006
D J Dennis, One Day at a Time, UQP Brisbane, 1992
Peter Haran, Shockwave An Australian Combat Helicopter Crew in Vietnam, New Holland, Sydney, 2004
Peter Haran and Bob Kearney, Crossfire An Australian Reconnaissance Unit in Vietnam, New Holland, Sydney, 2001
Barry Heard, Well Done, Those Men, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2005
Siobhan McHugh, Minefields and Miniskirts, Doubleday, Sydney, 1993
Gary McKay, Sleeping With Your Ears Open, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999
Mike Towers, A Jungle Circus, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999
Denis Warner, Not Always on Horseback, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997

Unit Histories
Bob Breen, First to Fight, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988

Charles S Mollison, Long Tan and Beyond, Cobbs Crossing Publications, Woombye, 2004

Websites
ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee of Queensland http://www.warandidentity.com.au
Australians at War http://www.australiansatwar.gov.au
Australians at War Film Archive http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au
Australian War Memorial http://www.awm.gov.au
Digger History http://www.diggerhistory.info
Vietnam Veterans’ Association of Australia http://www.vvaa.org.au

Maps and travel guides

Films
Long Tan: The true story, 1993
The Sharp End, 1992
Eyes of the Tiger – Diary of a Dirty War, 2006
Jungle Rain, 2006
**Introductory activity: Thinking about the Vietnam War**

1. What do you know about the Vietnam War? Brainstorm to set out all your existing ideas and information.

Imagine that these people were coming to your class to talk to you about their experiences of the Vietnam War.

2. List a few questions you would like to ask each of them.

3. Share your questions with the class. From the whole list, choose the ‘top 10’ that you would ask the soldier, the protester and the Vietnamese person. Record the questions in a table like this:

   **Questions I would like to ask people in Australia about their Vietnam War experiences:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier</th>
<th>Protester</th>
<th>Vietnamese refugee</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

What you have done is to start thinking about what the experience was like for people in a significant period of Australia’s history.

This resource, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, will help you develop your answers to these questions. It will also give you the confidence to invite real people who experienced the war into your classroom, and to put your questions to them.

It will help you to explore and answer your own questions, and you will be able to develop a questionnaire to use when interviewing people who lived during the period.

As you work through the resource materials you should record any new questions that you think of to ask these people. You can see more information and suggestions about interviewing people in your local community on pages 56, 80 and 98.