

Subject/Topic- United States History 8

Serving Those Who Have Served Us- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Grade- 8

Duration- Three Days in class during the two weeks leading up to the visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.

Rational- Service to those who have fallen for our country is not only valuable to the families and memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, but it's also a valuable lesson on gratitude and empathy for Middle School aged students. It is with this rationale that students participate in laying something meaningful to a person whose name is listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The objective- Students will use research skills to understand the life of a man or woman whose name is listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Through research skills, they will be able to determine what would be a meaningful "gift" to leave underneath the name at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Students will also have a meaningful and personal connection when we visit the memorial so that it becomes a more impactful experience.

The Lesson-

Discussion- While this quote is on the Korean Memorial, it starts with a discussion of what the phrase "Freedom is not free" means. By this point in the year, the students know from all that they have learned throughout the year that our country was founded and supported over the years by men and women sacrificing so much so that we can live in a free country today. Freedom comes with a price and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a symbol of this price for freedom.

Historical Context- Brief overview of the social view of Vietnam Veterans when they came home from the war. This is to give them the context that it was a controversial war and often times displaced anger was placed upon the men and women who came home. Some went by choice, some didn't, but they all sacrificed for the greater good and deserve to be honored.

Discussion- Some didn't come home at all. This leads to the discussion of what should a country do for those who sacrificed their lives in the name of their country. Typically students suggest memorials or some way to remember and thank them.

Historical Context- Background information about the history of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as well as some of the controversy. Background information about the contest that went out and the winning submission by Maya Lin. We will talk about the symbolism and intent of the submission as well as what they will see when they go on their Washington D.C. trip. They will come to realize the magnitude of the memorial and the experience of being there.

Assignment- Day 1 Find a Connection. Using the app The Wall, the students will look for someone who is named on the memorial for whom they will honor when we go to Washington D.C. They can narrow their search to find someone who might have something in common with them or perhaps someone who they have come to realize has an actual connection to their family or family friend. The degree of separation at this point in time isn't so distant that some students find out that someone their

grandparents knew well is named on the memorial. Ultimately, the goal is for the students to choose someone that they connect with. It is not a random selection because that wouldn't have the impact or the power when they visit the memorial.

Day 2- Research. Students will research the life of their fallen veteran. They will get to know them on a more personal level through this research. Often times, students reach out to family members and are met with incredible success and thankfulness. We have multiple, heart-warming stories of gratitude on the part of relatives or friends of the veteran being researched. While this is listed as one day, we begin this project two weeks prior to our trip and this gives students time to do the research and make any connections on their own at home.

Day 3- Creation of the item that will be left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in honor of the veteran they have researched. This is where they put it all together and create something that is symbolic of the life of the veteran on the wall. Their ideas are far and wide in terms of what each student thinks would be important to the veteran or the veteran's family. One year we had a student find out that a letter had been written to her veteran from someone in his platoon that "when they get home, they are going to share a root beer float together". She decided to have ice cream floats with her class in his honor as she told them his story. Then she left the patriotic decorated container along with a few cans of root beer, an ice cream scoop, and a letter she had written to him below his name when she visited the memorial with her class. We also had a student select someone from her hometown and found out that in the summer, he spent time at a very specific beach that locals knew about. She went to that beach, scooped up some sand and left it in a decorative container for him. The ideas are limitless and the kids take ownership. What they come up with far exceeds anything we as adults could list for them.

Historical Context- This is also when we talk about some items that are left at the wall and what they could represent or mean. We also talk about what happens to the items that are left and some of the more interesting things that the Park Services has found. Their items will join a long list of meaningful gifts placed at the wall over the years.

Grading Rubric and Assessment- While it is unconventional, there is no "letter grade" for this assignment. Within the context of students knowing full well the magnitude of this assignment, I tell them that this is too important and too meaningful for a grade. The assessment and the grade is really internal. Since the goal is to "serve those who have served us", that is measured in their hearts and their minds as they physically touch the name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and lay the gift at the base below the name. Any teacher can imagine the feeling of satisfaction as kids take service for others this seriously for the sake of the experience and not for a quantifiable grade.