

## A Sampling of Documentaries and Feature Films Relating to the Vietnam Era

***Note for Educators:*** I highly encourage you to preview any films listed on my website very carefully before recommending or presenting them to students. It is vital that you make sure they are appropriate for your students and your classroom. I also recommend that you always provide a film guide. Some guides, as you will see, are linked with specific films on this list. A generic Film Viewing Guide can be found on my website, as well as samples of Parent/Guardian Film Viewing Permission Forms.

### Documentary Films:

**The Anderson Platoon** (1967) A film that follows a U. S. Army platoon for six weeks during the Vietnam War, as the soldiers eat, sleep, fight, gamble, pray and die together. Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Documentary.

**Be Good, Smile Pretty** (2003) Chronicles the heart-wrenching journey to understand and cope with the loss shared by the estimated 20,000 American children whose fathers were killed in Vietnam.

**Chicago 1968** (1995) Explores the chaotic atmosphere of the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention . A PBS American Experience production.

**Cold War** (1998) Documentary series which examines the Cold War and its influence on history, culture, technology, economics, and the modern psyche. Episode 11 focuses on the Vietnam War.

**Daughter from Danang** (2002) This PBS documentary examines the story of an “Americanized” woman who was separated from her mother at the end of the Vietnam War. They are reunited after 22 years. Teacher’s Guide: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/tguide/index.html>

**Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam**, HBO (1988) Letters, newsreels and home movie footage from people who served in Vietnam.

**The Fog of War** (2003) The story of America as seen through the eyes of the former Secretary of Defense, under President Kennedy and President Johnson, Robert S. McNamara. Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Teacher’s Guide: [http://www.sonyclassics.com/fogofwar/\\_media/pdf/lessonPlanFOG.pdf](http://www.sonyclassics.com/fogofwar/_media/pdf/lessonPlanFOG.pdf)

**Gold Star Children** (2013) An award-winning documentary about child survivors of war casualties, written by Mitty Griffis Mirrer, a Gold Star Child herself.

**Guerilla Wars-- People’s Century** (1997) (WGBH) Depicts Viet Cong's hit-and-run tactics inflicted upon U.S. soldiers, facing sabotage by unlikely soldiers, booby traps, and ambush. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplescentury/episodes/guerrillawars/description.html> Teacher’s Guide: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplescentury/teachers/tgguerrilla.html>

**Hitchhiking Vietnam: Letters from the Trail** (1997) Karin Muller's extraordinary documentary about her experiences traveling on-her-own for seven months in Vietnam.

**Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision** (1994) This Academy Award winning documentary film explores the story of The Wall and examines a decade of Maya Lin’s creative work.

**Medal of Honor Book** <https://www.youtube.com/user/MedalOfHonorBook> This site features poignant interviews of Medal of Honor recipients.

**My Lai** (2010) PBS documentary focusing on the 1968 My Lai massacre, its subsequent cover-up, and the heroic efforts of the soldiers who broke ranks to try to halt the atrocities, and then bring them to light.

**Regret to Inform** (2000) Film maker, Barbara Sonneborn, makes a pilgrimage to the Vietnamese countryside where her husband died. She explores the meaning of war and loss on a human level and weaves interviews with Vietnamese and American widows into a vivid testament to the discomfiting legacy of war.

**Return with Honor**, (1999) (PBS) Story of American airmen held as prisoners of war in North Vietnam.

**The Sixties** (2014) 10-Episode CNN Series exploring the decade that shaped America.

**1968—with Tom Brokaw** (2007) Documentary produced by the History Channel. Teacher guide with film questions for students: <http://www.history.com/images/media/pdf/1968guide.pdf>

**They Were Young and Brave** (1994) Eleven former American soldiers, including Lt. Gen. Harold (Hal) Moore and Journalist Joseph Galloway, return to the Ia Drang Valley to relive the battle which some historians have called the turning point in the war. Excellent documentary produced by ABC News.

**A Touch of Home: The Vietnam War's Red Cross Girls** (2007) Arrowhead Films. This documentary tells the story of 627 young American women who served in the American Red Cross Supplemental Recreation Overseas program during the Vietnam War.

**Vietnam: A Television History** (1983) A 13-part PBS documentary that examines America's involvement in Vietnam. Based on the book by Stanley Karnow. **Teacher's Guide:** <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/vietnam/>

**Vietnam in HD** (2011) A six-episode History Channel Production focusing on the firsthand experiences of thirteen Americans during the Vietnam War. <http://www.history.com/shows/vietnam-in-hd>

**Vietnam Perspective** (1985) This 34-minute documentary gives a chronology of foreign involvement in Southeast Asia, highlighting America's participation in the Vietnam War.

**The Vietnam War with Walter Cronkite/ CBS News** (1987) Contains on-the-scene reports by correspondents Ed Bradley, Walter Cronkite, Charles Kuralt, Dan Rather, Morley Safer, Bob Simon and others. Includes interviews with combat veterans.

**The Vietnam War/ PBS (2017) An 18-hour documentary film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (2017)**  
**Classroom resources:** <https://virginia.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/kenburnsclassroom/film/the-vietnam-war/>

**War Letters** (2011) PBS documentary based on the book *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, by Andrew Carroll. **Teacher Guide:** <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/warletters/>

**Why Vietnam?** (1965) Department of Defense film. President Lyndon Johnson outlines U.S. policy relating to South Vietnam in an address to the American people.

## Feature Films/Television Programs

**Apocalypse Now** (1979) Remake of Joseph Conrad's book, *Heart of Darkness*, with a Vietnam War setting. Stars Martin Sheen, Robert Duvall, and Marlon Brando.

**Born on the Fourth of July** (1989) Story of paralyzed Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic turned anti-war activist and his many challenges assimilating back into American society. Stars Tom Cruise.

**Casualties of War** (1989) Based on the true story of a squad of soldiers caught in the moral quagmire of wartime Vietnam. Stars Michael J. Fox and Sean Penn.

**China Beach** (1988-91) Award winning television program about the nurses, entertainers and volunteers who served alongside American troops in Vietnam at the China Beach recreational facility near the U.S. base at Da Nang.

**Coming Home** (1978) Academy Award winning story of a wounded veteran and his readjustment to civilian life. Stars Jane Fonda, Jon Voigt and Bruce Dern.

**The Deer Hunter** (1978) Academy Award winning drama following a group of steel worker friends from their peaceful lives in Pittsburgh to the Vietnam War. Stars Robert DeNiro, Meryl Streep and Christopher Walken .

**Forrest Gump** (1994) Academy Award winning film following the life of low I.Q. Forrest Gump and the love of his life, Jenny. The film chronicles his accidental experiences with some of the most important people and events in America from the late 1950's through the 1970's, including the Vietnam War. Stars Tom Hanks, Robin Wright, and Gary Sinise.

**Full Metal Jacket** (1987) A squad of Marine grunts fight the battle of Hue City during the climactic Tet Offensive. Directed by Stanley Kubrick.

**Good Morning, Vietnam** (1987) Tells the story of an American disc jockey assigned to U.S. Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam. Stars Robin Williams.

**Go Tell the Spartans** (1978) Tells the story of an American advisory group in Vietnam in 1964. Stars Burt Lancaster.

**The Green Berets** (1968) Story of the Green Berets, the elite Special Forces, during the war in Vietnam. Stars John Wayne.

**Hamburger Hill** (1987) A bloody, violent account of the struggle of American forces to secure a particular hill in Vietnam.

**Hanoi Hilton** (1987) American captives in Hanoi's Hao Lo Prison survive turbulent years as POWs.

**Heaven & Earth** (1993) Film based on the memoirs, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* by Le Ly Hayslip with Jay Wurts and *Child of War, Woman of Peace* by Le Ly Hayslip with James Hayslip. Traces Ms. Hayslip's life from Vietnam to the U.S. Directed by Oliver Stone.

**In Country** (1989) A reclusive Vietnam War veteran and his 17-year-old niece struggle to heal the wounds of Vietnam, where her father died.

**Indochine** (1992) Moving film focusing on a rubber plantation owner in French Indochina in the 1930s and her adopted Vietnamese daughter, who falls in love with a French naval officer and gets involved in the anti-colonial struggles of the times. French with English subtitles.

**Journey from the Fall** (2006) Based on the true stories of Vietnamese refugees who fled after the fall of Saigon, April 30, 1975, and on the Vietnamese who stayed behind.

**The Killing Fields** (1984) Academy Award winning film based on the book "The Death and Life of Dith Pran" by Sydney Schanberg. Tells the true story of a survivor of the Khmer Rouge brutality in Cambodia, 1975-79.

**Platoon** (1988) Academy Award winning film focusing on the daily experience of infantry soldiers in Vietnam. Directed by Oliver Stone.

**The Quiet American** (2002) This screen adaptation of Graham Greene's novel *The Quiet American* tells the story of a cynical British journalist who leaves England to live in Southeast Asia, where he is reporting on the Vietnamese fight for independence from French colonial rule. Stars Michael Caine.

**Rambo: First Blood Part II** (1985) John Rambo is released from prison by the government for a top-secret covert mission to the jungles of Vietnam—the last place he would want to return. Stars Sylvester Stallone.

**Rescue Dawn** (2006) This film is based on the true story of German-born Dieter Dengler, who dreamed of being a pilot and eventually made his way to the United States, where he joined the Navy during the Vietnam War era. He became a pilot and was shot down over Laos and captured. Eventually he organized an escape with a small band of captives. Stars Christian Bale.

**Three Seasons** (1999) An ex-G.I. in Ho Chi Minh City searches for a daughter he left behind in the war. Stars Harvey Keitel.

**To Heal a Nation** (1992) Chronicles Jan Scruggs' efforts to build a Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This film is well worth showing to students, especially if they are planning to visit the Memorial in Washington, DC. Stars Eric Roberts as Jan Scruggs.

**Tour of Duty** (1987-1990) CBS television series portraying the trials of a U.S. Army platoon serving in the field during the Vietnam War.

**Uncommon Valor** (1983) An MIA rescue adventure film. Stars Robert Stack and Gene Hackman.

**We Were Soldiers** (2002) Vietnam War film that dramatizes the Battle of the Ia Drang on November 14, 1965. The film was directed by Randall Wallace and stars Mel Gibson. Based on the book *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*, by Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore (ret.) and Joseph L. Galloway. The film was directed by Randall Wallace and stars Mel Gibson.

**Who'll Stop the Rain?** (1978) Explores the aftermath of the war and adjustment to civilian life. Stars Nick Nolte and Tuesday Weld.