

Youth and the Lessons of Vietnam

Lindy Poling serves on VVMF's Education Center at The Wall Content Advisory Committee. A recently retired teacher, she developed a "Lessons of Vietnam Class" at Millbrook High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, which she taught for 14 years. The class included a Washington, D.C. field trip to The Wall. The following are excerpts of students' reactions to the class and their thoughts about The Wall and plans for the new Education Center.

This experience taught me the importance of understanding the past, but most importantly, it taught me to care. That is why the Education Center is necessary — to teach people that this war mattered, is important even today, and that the veterans deserve our utmost respect. The Wall is the most moving and powerful memorial that I've ever visited. The Education Center will provide young people with a connection to the era, to veterans, the generations before them, and the wisdom that comes with a greater understanding of these things. — *Michael Raynor, Poling Class 2011*

Young people should learn about the Vietnam War because it teaches critical thinking skills. It teaches students that the world has many grey areas. Young people must learn to research and think through all the various information and come to their own opinions. This is a hard skill to learn, and there are few opportunities to teach it. There seems to be a lack of compassion among youth. The more you are exposed to, the more you grow in understanding of others. This experience truly shaped who I am. — *Sarah Tudor Thompson, Poling Class 1999*

If we want a successful future, we must allow our future leaders to benefit from the past. The Education Center at The Wall will help students experience the Vietnam era outside the textbook and reflect on how we can create a better America for future generations. The Vietnam era is particularly difficult to talk about, and that's why we need the Education Center to help remember those who have fallen and the many great lessons to be learned from our triumphs as well as our failures. — *Eric Carstens, Poling Class 2007, and Class of 2014, George Washington University School of Law*

Vietnam was the first war in American history that made the public examine the morality of war. When you see The Wall and all of the names, you are impacted by the immense loss of life that it represents. There needs to be an Education Center right next to the Vietnam Memorial because every American who feels that gut-wrenching effect of the Wall will question: Was it worth it? Is war worth this? — *Ashley Honeycutt, Poling Class 2008*

When it comes to Vietnam, students are often given biased or incomplete truth based on what a particular school system says is the most important thing for us to know. It is more important to be truly educated than to satisfy someone's bullet points. Learning about Vietnam, its lessons and precedents, and how they relate to modern military politics is one of the best ways to teach young people about war, and most importantly, how to think for themselves. — *DJ Rogers, Poling Class 2007*

I visited The Wall with a second grader who asked me what it was all about — and for a few minutes, I was at a loss at what to say. The Memorial is a beautiful tribute to the lives lost, but it doesn't explain the war. The Vietnam era transcends the names on The Wall and is almost impossible to explain on any level without the context that the Education Center will provide. — *Molly Emmett, Poling Class 2008*

As I approached The Wall, I was consumed by the majesty of 58,286 names, flowers, and flags carefully left by those whose hearts are connected to one of those small lines of text. For a moment, time stopped and the past met the present, as I touched the name that touched my reflection. It was as if each name whispered, "This sacrifice was for you." I began to realize the power of connecting history to the present. It was one of the moments in my life that inspired me to become a history teacher. I have the privilege now to open my students to the power that I experienced that day at The Wall. It is my hope that they, too, feel a connection beyond words and beyond the limitations of time. — *Wes Brown, Poling Class 2006, History and Social Studies Instructor, Ravenscroft School*

