Lesson Plan: *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam*

**Soldiers’ Stories**

**OBJECTIVES**

This lesson will help students:

- practice conducting an oral history interview
- learn to analyze media interviews
- increase knowledge about what it is like to be a soldier
- gain knowledge about the Viet Nam War
- gain knowledge about the Chicano experience in the U.S.

**GRADE LEVEL**

9-12

**SUBJECT AREAS**

Social Studies, American History (Viet Nam), Media Literacy

**MATERIALS**

- VHS of *Soldados: Chicanos in Vietnam* with VCR & Monitor
- Access to the Internet for student research
- Contact with local veterans group(s)

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED**

2-6 class periods, depending on whether work is done in class or assigned as homework.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Viet Nam War (referred to by Vietnamese as the American War) began for the United States in 1963 and ended with its military withdrawal in 1973. The war resulted in more than 58,000 dead and 300,000 wounded on the U.S. side, and close to 2 million Vietnamese civilian and military casualties. Over 170,000 Hispanics served and 5.2% of them (over 3,000) died. The film *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam* gives voice to a handful of those Hispanic soldiers.

Oral history has been a vital tool in preserving the social and cultural history of communities across the globe. It especially allows for the contribution of voices not included in traditional history texts or government documents. *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam*, fits well in that tradition. The experiences of Chicano soldiers (soldados) have been largely absent from the historical record of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam. The U.S. government did not even begin keeping separate statistics on Hispanics until 1979.

As a 26-minute long film, *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam* is a perfect classroom tool to engage students in an examination of the Viet Nam War. It raises a wide variety of issues, including the long-term impact of being a soldier, the difference in experiences for
soldiers of color and white soldiers, how a country justifies going to war, and how Viet Nam veterans were treated when they returned from combat.

Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam is also an excellent tool to help engage students in the process of doing oral history. Conducting oral history interviews provides students with a rich opportunity to look at history through the eyes of people in their own families or community. The technique requires students to engage in research, writing, speaking, interpreting, and editing. This lesson also adds media analysis skills.

**ACTIVITY**

In preparation for conducting their own oral history interviews, students will compare three different interview sources:

**Step 1:** Record an interview from any television program. Barbara Walters, Charlie Rose, Bill Moyers, the NewsHour on PBS, Bill O’Reilly, or a radio talk show host would all provide good examples. An interview related to a topic students have studied or are studying will work best, but it is possible to use almost any interview. Show the tape to students with instructions that they pay attention to:

- What questions were asked?
- Were the questions asked in any particular order that you noticed (e.g., easy to hard, general to more personal, work followed by family life, etc.)?
- How were the questions asked?
- Were you satisfied with the answers?
- If not, is there a different question you would ask or a different way you would ask it?

**Step 2:** Have students investigate oral history interviews done with soldiers who served in Viet Nam. The following three Internet sites provide good examples:

http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/vietnam/curriculum.html - POV
http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/oralhistory/ - Texas Tech

Though some of the websites provide audio of the interviews, ask that students read them in print form. Have students answer the same set of questions they used to analyze the TV interview.

**Step 3:** Repeat the process of analyzing an interview by viewing Soldados: Chicanos In Viet Nam and answering the questions again.

**Step 4:** Guide students in comparing the results from the TV, print, and documentary film style interviews. Also have them compare the purposes of the interviews, i.e., to entertain, to preserve history, to explore a specific topic.

**Step 5:** Go back to any of the three oral history websites and have students look at the recommended techniques for conducting oral history interviews. Adding what they have now learned about interview strategies, have students prepare to do their own oral history
with a Viet Nam veteran in their community. Preparation should include understanding the basic history and consequences of the conflict.

**Step 6:** Work with veterans groups in your community to match students with interview subjects.

**Step 7:** Have students conduct oral histories and write up summaries of their interviews, including all the questions they asked.

**Step 8:** Ask students to compare what they learned from their interview subjects with what they learned from the soldiers featured in *Soldados* and/or with the interviews they read on the oral history websites. In particular, ask them to look for patterns related to the treatment of white soldiers and soldiers of color.

**Step 9** (optional): Have students submit their oral histories to one of the websites mentioned above.

**ASSESSMENT**
Ask students to turn in their written summaries in Step 7. Because an interviewer can’t always control the quality of the answers they receive, assess student performance on the quality of questions they asked. Do the questions indicate appropriate factual knowledge? Are the questions respectful? Do the questions focus on key issues?

**EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS**
- Record the oral histories on videotape and have students arrange to show them at a community event where the interview subjects are invited as guests of honor.
- Invite a Viet Nam vet to your class to share their experiences. Invite veterans from other wars to do the same and have students assess the similarities and differences in their stories.
- Invite a family member of a soldier who went to Viet Nam but who did not survive. Have them share what the War was like for them.
- Study the contributions of Chicanos to the history, culture, and economy of the United States.

**RESOURCES**
For additional resources, see the website and general discussion guide for the film at [www.pbs.org/pov/soldados/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/soldados/)
STANDARDS
Main standards covered include:

United States History, Era 9 (1945 to early 1970s)
Standard 27:
3. Understands the social issues that resulted from U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Era 10 - (1968 to the present)
Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Additional relevant standards include:

Language Arts – Reading
Standard 5: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Language Arts - Writing
Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Language Arts - Listening and Speaking
Standard 8: Using listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Language Arts – Viewing
Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.
1. Uses a range of strategies to interpret visual media (e.g., draws conclusions, makes generalizations, synthesizes materials viewed, refers to images or information in visual media to support point of view, deconstructs media to determine the main idea)
2. Uses a variety of criteria (e.g., clarity, accuracy, effectiveness, bias, relevance of facts) to evaluate informational media (e.g., web sites, documentaries, news programs)
3. Understands the conventions of visual media genres (e.g., a talk show contains an opening monologue, humorous discussion between host and a side kick, guest interview, interaction with the audience, and special performances; news programs present the events of the day as stories with setting, character, conflict, and resolution)
5. Uses strategies to analyze stereotypes in visual media (e.g., recognizes stereotypes that serve the interests of some groups in society at the expense of others; identifies techniques used in visual media that perpetuate stereotypes)