



LESSON Impressions of War

OVERVIEW

The United States has been at war in Iraq and Afghanistan for almost the entire lives of students in high school or college today. Those who have never been to war must base their impressions of it largely on the stories told in movies, television, music and books. Hearing first-hand testimonials of war and considering how they compare to the media's depictions can be valuable, especially at a time in students' lives when many may be seriously considering whether to pursue or eschew a military career. This lesson is designed to help students develop a critical awareness of the sources of our ideas about war and what it's like to be a service member who went to war.

Using video clips from the documentary film *Of Men and War*, students will see war through the eyes of veterans who returned home from war with PTSD. They'll compare the stories told in the film with other media they have seen (or played) that convey messages about the nature of war.

A Note to Teachers: This lesson asks students to listen to war stories from real veterans. These stories are graphic and disturbing, and most of them contain profanity. If you suspect that administrators or parents might object to such content, you may want to solicit permission ahead of time by explaining how the lesson relates to your curriculum (and the school's) goals.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow any time during the school year—for free! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- write a comparative essay
- analyze at least two different media genres and their messages about war and serving in the military
- reflect on the sources of their own ideas about what it's like to serve in the military
- be able to define PTSD

GRADE LEVELS:

10-12, College

SUBJECT AREAS

civics/government
English/language arts (writing)
media literacy

social studies
U.S. history

MATERIALS

- Film clips from *Of Men and War* and equipment on which to show them
- Internet access for research

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

1 class period (40-50 min.) plus homework

FILM CLIPS

Film clips provided in this lesson are from *Of Men and War*.

Clip 1: “The Kill” (3:23 min.)

The clip begins at 5:45 with a service member recalling, “I remember my vehicle stopping.” It ends at

9:08 with the service member saying that when he sleeps, “I see him.”

A service member describes killing a man who was just 25 meters away, and not knowing whether the man was actually an enemy or merely a guy “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Clip 2: “Collateral Damage” (1:28 min.)

At 23:48, a service member begins his story by saying, “They said it doesn’t matter. If someone gets in front of your truck, you honk your horn. You don’t stop.” It ends at 25:16 with him saying, “You’d almost rather just be back on the boat.”

A service member describes riding in a truck that hit a child and wonders what he would have done if he had been driving.

Clip 3: “Watching a Friend Die” (2:50 min.)

The clip begins at 29:10 with a service member talking about taking heavy fire. It ends at 32:00 with the end of the story: “It’s just a horrible thing to watch your friend disappear forever within the confines of a body bag.”

A service member describes the death of the guy next to him in a battle.

Clip 4: “Blinded” (2:15 min.)

The clip starts at 38:15 with “Boom! Like...” and ends at 40:30 with “And she started crying.”

A service member describes being blinded by an explosion, hearing screaming and then realizing he was the one screaming. He then describes telling his mother that he had lost his vision.

Clip 5: “Surviving a Mortar” (1:10 min.)

The clip begins at 45:07 as a service member starts his story: “They said it happened 15 meters in front of me.” It ends at 46:17, when he describes feeling like God was just “watching me squirm.”

A service member recalls what he was thinking as he was lying on the ground, staring at the sky after being hit by a mortar.

Clip 6: “The Undertaker” (2:09 min.)

The clip begins at 55:12 with a service member who takes care of the deceased beginning to describe one day during his tour, saying, “I opened the back of the high back and blood just comes pouring out.” It ends at 57:21 with the service member saying, “Your mind starts playing tricks on you at that point.”

The service member graphically describes processing a truckload of bodies and how, in order to preserve his sanity, he had to stop seeing them as people with friends and wives and children.

Clip 7: “Being Home” (2:33)

The clip begins at 14:50 with a wedding photo in the home of one of the service members. It ends at 17:23 with his wife saying, “Yeah, not even threatening you with divorce has worked.”

A service member and his wife describe what it’s been like since he’s returned home from war.

ACTIVITY

1. Opening Discussion: Connecting Ideas to Sources

Give students several minutes and ask each to write five ideas of what they think it’s like to be a service member on active duty. They should work as individuals to do this part of the activity. To connect to curriculum, you might want to specify a certain conflict and nationality (e.g., U.S. service member in the Vietnam War, Union service member in the U.S. Civil War, U.S. service member in the war in Afghanistan).

When time is up, invite students to share briefly what they have written. Then, as a class, have students generate a list of the sources of their ideas. Encourage them to reach beyond news or personal encounters with service members to include things such as films, video games, novels, textbooks, military recruiters, television commercials, songs and so on.

2. *Of Men and War* Clips

Tell students that you’re going to add to their sources by showing them clips from a documentary film about U.S. veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and who are recovering from PTSD. Before you begin the screening, make sure everyone understands what PTSD is.

Show two or more of the film clips. Acknowledge both before and during that the clips are powerful, intense and disturbing. They may upset some students and you may want to pause briefly after each clip to let students quietly process what they’ve just seen. Then engage the class in a discussion about how the clips inform or add to their thinking about what it’s like to be a service member. What do they think about what service members are asked to do or see? If you chose to show **Clip 7**, ask students to reflect on how war affects those at home and their relationships with veterans.

Be sure that students take in the information without overgeneralizing—not all Iraq or Afghanistan war veterans return with serious mental health issues. Nevertheless, the stories of these veterans add important perspective about military service.

3. “Impressions of War” Essay Assignment

Assign students to write an “Impressions of War” essay comparing one of the service member’s stories from *Of Men and War* with one of the sources of their pre-existing ideas about being a service member. The assignment will be most relevant if students choose from a source they actually use/know, like a favorite film, television series or video game. Students who can’t identify or access their own sources might choose one of these:

Video Game “Call of Duty: World at War—Mission 4: Vendetta ‘Veteran Mode’”:

<https://youtu.be/l14B3e9LHnk?t=1m47s>

Army Recruiting Video: “Symbol of Strength—More Than a Uniform”:

<https://youtu.be/zRxxBVMwFoU>

Marines Recruitment Website: www.marines.com

Novel: *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane; chapter 5 is of particular interest: <http://americanliterature.com/author/stephen-crane/book/the-red-badge-of-courage/summary>

Alternatively, you might assign a comparison between the *Of Men and War* clips and a curriculum-connected resource, such as a novel or other text that students have read for class, or materials distributed on campus by military recruiters. Advanced students might be asked to compare more than two sources.

Essays should include comparisons of the techniques used in each source, as well as the message(s) that each media document conveys about going to war.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

1. Invite veterans from different time periods/wars to share their experiences with the class.
2. Learn more about PTSD and investigate services available in your community for veterans (and their families) who are dealing with PTSD. Find out what students can do to help. If appropriate, create related service learning opportunities.
3. Conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the messages about war typically conveyed by mass media. Whose voices dominate? Whose are absent?
4. Write a letter to your elected federal representatives and/or the president outlining the criteria you believe they should consider before agreeing to send U.S. troops into combat.

RESOURCES

The Film

POV: *Of Men and War*

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/ofmenandwar> - The site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Film Site: *Of Men and War*

<http://www.menandwar.com> - The *Of Men and War* website includes information on the film and how to purchase the DVD.

Project Look Sharp: Media Construction of War

<http://projectlooksharp.org/?action=war> – This site offers a free downloadable curriculum kit, including easy-to-use media documents and suggestions for classroom analysis of them.

Scholastic: “Should Military Recruiters Be Allowed in High Schools?”

www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=10852 – This is a simple-to-read pro and con piece from Scholastic and *The New York Times Upfront*.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: National Center for PTSD

www.ptsd.va.gov – This website provides research, information and resources related to veterans with PTSD.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[SL.11-12.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

[SL.11-12.3](#) Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis and tone used.

[W.9-10.1](#) & [11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[W.9-10.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

[W.11-12.2d](#) Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

[W.9-10.4](#), [11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.