

4.6.3 - Resettlement of Southeast Asian Refugees in Washington State (Elementary)

The Asian American Education Project

Grade Levels	3-6
Lesson Overview	Immediately after the Vietnam War (1955-1975), nearly 130,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong refugees resettled in the United States. Then governor of Washington Dan Evans (born 1925) invited refugees arriving in California to resettle in Washington. As such, Camp Murray, a military base, became a temporary home for 500-600 refugees in 1975. In this lesson, students will learn about the resettlement experiences of Southeast Asian refugees in Washington. They will listen to and analyze oral history recorded by refugees and discuss the importance of oral history as a learning tool.
Lesson Objectives	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe the resettlement experiences of Southeast Asian refugees in Washington. ● Analyze oral histories to learn about the past.
Standards	<p>Washington Social Studies Learning Standard: Elementary School Standards</p> <p>H3: Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● H3.3.2 Explain connections among historical contexts and people’s perspectives at the time. ● H3.4.2 Explain connections between historical context and people’s perspective of Washington state history. ● H3.3.3/H3.4.3/H3.5.3 Describe how people’s perspectives shaped the historical sources they created. <p>College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● D2.His.6.3-5. Describe how people’s perspectives shaped the historical sources they created. ● D2.His.10.3-5. Compare information provided by different historical sources about the past. ● D2.His.11.3-5. Infer the intended audience and purpose of a historical source from information within the source itself. ● D2.His.13.3-5. Use information about a historical source, including the maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose to judge the extent to which the source is useful for studying a particular topic. <p>Common Core State Standards: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading</p>



- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. |
|--|---|

Resettlement of Southeast Asian Refugees in Washington State Essay

In the 1950s, North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam. North Vietnam was **communist**. South Vietnam was not. North Vietnam wanted to unite the two countries. They wanted to form a communist nation. The United States feared the spread of communism. It joined the war to help South Vietnam. Many U.S. army soldiers were sent to fight in Vietnam. This led to a very long and deadly war. The war is known as “The Vietnam War” in the United States. It is known as “The Resistance War Against the United States” or “The American War” in North Vietnam. In the twenty years of war, millions of people had died. Many people had been injured. Many were **displaced**.

In April 1975, North Vietnam took control of Saigon. Saigon is South Vietnam’s capital city. (Today, Saigon is called Ho Chi Minh City.) This marked the end of the war. The United States quickly **evacuated**. Many South Vietnamese also wanted to escape. They feared being punished by the new communist government.

In May 1975, U.S. President Gerald Ford signed a law. This law let **refugees** from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos come to the United States. It also set aside money for a **resettlement** program. When refugees first arrived in the United States, they were sent to resettlement centers. These centers were also called refugee camps. They were quickly set up. Refugees lived there for a short time. Then, they were sent to different cities. They were matched with **sponsors**. These sponsors helped them get jobs. They helped them find housing. They helped them get used to life in their new home country.

Camp Pendleton was a Marines base. It is in San Diego, California. It was the first U.S. refugee camp that opened for Southeast Asian refugees. Many refugees came through Camp Pendleton. The camp was crowded. There were limited resources. California wasn’t able to resettle all of the refugees coming through Camp Pendleton. Dan Evans was the Governor of Washington. He wanted to help. He sent Ralph Munro to Camp Pendleton. Munro was a staff member. He invited refugees to come to Washington. Refugees were sent to Camp Murray. Camp Murray was a military base. It was turned into a refugee camp. From May to October of 1975, 500-600 refugees came through Camp Murray. Many resettled in Washington.

Officials in Washington helped Southeast Asian refugees find jobs. They matched them with sponsors. They funded a newspaper called “Dat Moi” (“new land”). “Dat Moi” was the first Vietnamese language newspaper in the United States. It helped Vietnamese refugees access important information. It also increased their sense of belonging.

Southeast Asian refugees made new lives in Washington. They faced many challenges. It was hard to live in a new place. It was hard to learn a new culture. Some people welcomed them. But others accused them of taking jobs away from Americans. Some said they brought diseases from Asia. People assumed they couldn’t speak English. However, that was not true. Some of the refugees worked with Americans during the war. As such, they could speak English. Regardless, the refugees were treated like outsiders.

The refugees found ways to thrive. They supported each other. They built **community** together. They helped each other find jobs, housing, schools, healthcare, and more. They worked. They paid taxes. They started businesses. Their children attended local schools.

Southeast Asian refugees began to form **ethnic enclaves** in Washington. Many Vietnamese residents settled in Seattle's Chinatown. Over time they opened shops and restaurants. That area is now known as Little Saigon. In 1981, a Vietnamese refugee named Duc Tran opened Little Saigon's first grocery store. It was called Viet-Wah Supermarket. (Viet-Wah closed in 2022.) Little Saigon faces many challenges. But it still serves as a cultural hub for the Vietnamese American community.

Another Vietnamese community in Washington is the Lincoln Business District in Tacoma. This area has many Vietnamese shops, businesses, and community centers. Every year, they host a Lunar New Year Festival. Many Vietnamese businesses, cultural groups, and residents participate. Cambodian Americans formed a community in the White Center area near West Seattle. White Center has hosted a Cambodian New Year Festival for 21 years.

As of 2020, Washington has the third largest **population** of Cambodian Americans in the United States. (California and Massachusetts have more). It has the fourth largest population of Vietnamese and Laotian Americans in the United States. (California, Texas, and Florida have the top populations for Vietnamese Americans. California, Texas, and Minnesota have the top populations for Laotian Americans.) Southeast Asian Americans continue to move to Washington. They join family members and a growing community.

Bibliography:

- AAPI Data. (2022). "State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in the United States 2022." <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/State-AANHPIs-National-June2022.pdf>
- Chew, Ron. (2015). "Close ties of Vietnamese, Seattle Asians paved way for 40-year journey." *International Examiner*. <https://iexaminer.org/close-ties-of-vietnamese-seattle-asians-paved-way-for-40-year-journey>. Accessed 8 April 2024.
- Chew, Ron. (2022). "The Final Day at the Viet-Wah Supermarket." *South Seattle Emerald*. <https://southseattleemerald.com/2022/10/06/the-final-day-at-the-viet-wah-supermarket/>. Accessed 10 May 2024.
- City of Tacoma, Washington. (2020). "Lincoln Business District." https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/community_and_economic_development/neighborhood_business_districts/lincoln. Accessed 10 May 2024.
- Constante, Agnes. (2020). "How Southeast Asian American Refugees Helped Shape America's Resettlement System." *NBC Asian America*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/how-southeast-asian-american-refugees-helped-shape-america-s-resettlement-n1187961>
- Department of Land Landscape Architecture, University of Washington, Seattle. (2014). "Placemaking Little Saigon: Neighborhood Design & Community Economic Development." <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OPCD/OngoingInitiatives/LittleSaigonBusinessDistrict/SeattleOPCD-PlacemakingLittleSaigonLA5032014report.pdf>. Accessed 10 May 2024.
- History.com Editors. (2023). "Vietnam War." *A&E Television Networks*. <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>. Accessed 8 April 2024.
- Lee, Erika. (2015). *The Making of Asian America: A History*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Loh-Hagan, Virginia, Giannela Gonzales, and Kathy Ho. (2022). "Southeast Asian Refugees: Make Them Count." *Social Education*, vol. 86, no. 2, pp. 87-91.
- Malcolm, Andrew H. (1975). "Gov. Evans Leads Washington State In Aiding Resettlement by Vietnamese." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/09/archives/gov-evans-leads-washington-state-in-aiding-resettlement-by.html>. Accessed 8 April 2024.

- Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) and Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles. (2020). "Southeast Asian American Journeys: A National Snapshot of Our Communities." https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SEARAC_NationalSnapshot_PrinterFriendly.pdf
- The Asian American Education Project. (2023). "Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Southern California." <https://asianamericanedu.org/vietnamese-refugees-in-socal.html>
- The Asian American Education Project. (2020). "Southeast Asian Refugees." <https://asianamericanedu.org/southeast-asian-refugees.html>
- The Seattle Times editorial board. (2015). "After the fall of Saigon: When Washington did the right thing for refugees." *The Seattle Times*. <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/when-washington-did-the-right-thing-for-refugees>. Accessed 8 April 2024.
- UCI Southeast Asian Archive. (1999). "Documenting the Southeast Asian Refugee Experience." SEA Archive. <https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/sites/all/publications/exhibits/seaexhibit/resettle.html>
- Vu, Tang. (2015). "COMMENTARY: Journey to Freedom — Revisiting the long journey from Vietnam to Camp Murray." *Northwest Asian Weekly*. <https://nwasianweekly.com/2015/04/commentary-journey-to-freedom-revisiting-the-long-journey-from-vietnam-to-camp-murray/>. Accessed 8 April 2024.
- Washington Military Department. (2015). "A Vietnamese Journey to Freedom: 40 years later." *Washington Military Department*. <https://mil.wa.gov/news/a-vietnamese-journey-to-freedom-40-years-later>. Accessed 8 April 2024.
- Wing Luke Museum. "Vietnamese Americans in Seattle." <https://digitalwingluke.org/jewels-and-gems/little-saigon-cultural-history-project>.

Vocabulary:¹

- **Communism:** a social system or system of government in which property and goods are owned in common
- **Community:** a group of people with common interests, goals, experiences, and histories, especially when living together
- **Displace:** to expel or force to flee from home or homeland
- **Ethnic enclave:** a distinct geographic area with a large population of a particular ethnic group
- **Evacuate:** to remove troops or people from a place of danger
- **Refugee:** a person who flees for safety, especially to a foreign country
- **Resettlement:** a program or process of moving refugees into a new place to live
- **Population:** the total number of people in a country or region
- **Sponsor:** one who takes responsibility for some other person or thing

¹ Definition adapted from Merriam-Webster

Discussion Questions:

1. What countries were involved in the Vietnam War?
2. How did the Fall of Saigon lead to refugees arriving in the United States?
3. Why did many Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees flee to the United States?
4. Why did Southeast Asian refugees resettle in Washington?
5. What challenges did refugees face in the United States?
6. What support did refugees have?



Activity 1: Introduction to Southeast Asian Refugees

- A. Ask students how much they know about the Vietnam War. If needed, teach The Asian American Education Project lessons entitled, “[Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Southern California](#)” and “[Southeast Asian Refugees](#).”
- B. Have students define the term “refugee.” Say the following: “A refugee is a person who leaves their home country because they aren’t or don’t feel safe there.”
- C. Explain that refugees are different from immigrants in that immigrants usually have more power over their decision to leave, while refugees have to leave because they can’t live in their home country anymore. (If needed, play this educational video about refugees: <https://youtu.be/25bwiSikRsl>. Option: Have students complete a Venn Diagram comparing refugees and immigrants.)
- D. Have students define the term “resettlement.” Say the following: “Resettlement is a program or process of moving refugees into a new place to live.”
- E. Ask students, “What kinds of support will people need when resettling in a new country?” Explain that refugees may need support with language, job training, accessing schools, transportation, and more.
- E. Show students a [Google Map of Southeast Asia](#). Point out Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Explain that these three countries were greatly impacted by a war that people in the United States call “The Vietnam War.” Explain that after the war, many people fled Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and some became refugees in the United States.

Activity 2: Learning About Refugee Experiences

- A. Have students read the essay. (Option: Create a slide deck with the essay content).
- B. Facilitate a class discussion by asking students the Discussion Questions.
- C. Show a clip (1:00-9:39) from the video entitled, “[Life After Vietnam](#).” Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
 1. What more did you learn from the video?
 2. What was the impact of hearing the Nguyen family’s story? How did it help you better understand what you read in the essay?
 3. What feelings came up for you as you heard Rochelle Nguyen tell her story?
 4. What questions do you have after watching the video?
 5. What is the impact of interviewing multiple people, including members of the Nguyen family, Governor Evans and Ralph Munro, in this video? Whose perspective is being shared?
 6. Do you feel anything is missing in this story?
- D. Explain that corroboration is the ability to compare information from two or more different sources and find similarities or patterns between them. Explain that when historians find corroborations between sources, it strengthens their understanding and arguments they are making about history.

- E. Explain that contradictions are when information conflicts or don't align or make sense. Explain that when historians find contradictions between sources, it pushes them to ask more questions and seek more information.
- F. Distribute the worksheet entitled, "[Corroboration Worksheet](#)." Have students complete the worksheet and use it to compare the essay and video.
1. First, have students identify elements of corroboration between the essay and video. (What do the essay and video agree on?)
 2. Second, have students identify elements of contradiction between the essay and video. (What do the essay and video disagree on?)
 3. Third, have students write down their conclusions about the resettlement experiences of Southeast Asian refugees in Washington.

Activity 3: The Importance of Oral Histories

- A. Ask students if they have heard of the term "oral history." Explain to students that oral history is a way of preserving firsthand accounts of history by recording personal recollections of history, usually through interviews. Ask students:
1. Why do you think oral history is important?
 2. How can oral history help historians learn about the past?
 3. What are other ways historians can learn about the past?
 4. Are oral histories always factually accurate? Why or why not?
- B. Have students listen to the audio of PhuongChi Nguyen, the daughter of Vietnamese refugees, interviewing her parents, Hung Phi Nguyen and Phuong Lucy Pham, from the story "[I heard on the loudspeaker that they call us refugees](#)" from the PBS First Days Story Project. (Note: The edited interview is 3:26; the unedited interview is 40:45. Listen to the edited interview or select parts of the unedited interview based on the needs of your students.)
1. Have students discuss the following questions with a partner:
 - a. What challenges did the Nguyens face?
 - b. What were the Nguyens' hopes?
 - c. How did listening to this story help you understand the refugee experience?
 - d. Why is it important to record oral history?
 - e. What more do you want to know? What questions would you ask?
- C. Distribute the worksheet entitled, "[Oral History Analysis](#)." If needed, have students listen to the oral history recording again.
1. For Part 1, have students complete the "Observe" section by answering the following questions:
 - a. What is the modality (i.e., audio, video, written transcript, written document, etc.)?
 - b. Who is telling the story? What do you know about them?
 - c. Is there an interviewer? What do you know about them?
 - d. When did the events being described take place? What events were happening at this time?
 - e. What other observations can you make?
 2. Have students complete the "Analyze" section by answering the following questions:
 - a. What purpose does the storyteller have in telling their story?
 - b. What are the storyteller's main claims? What is the storyteller revealing?

- c. What is the storyteller’s point of view?
 - d. What emotions or moods are being conveyed by the storyteller? How do you know?
 - e. What might be missing from this oral history?
3. Have students complete the “Reflect” section by answering the following questions:
 - a. What did you learn from this oral history?
 - b. What is the emotional impact of this oral history? How did this oral history affect you?
 - c. What other questions would you ask this person? What more do you want to know?
 4. For Part 2, have students use the corroboration strategies to complete the following:
 - a. Identify elements of corroboration between the oral history and what else you have learned.
 - b. Identify elements of contradiction between the oral history and what else you have learned.
 - c. What conclusions can you draw about the resettlement experiences of Vietnamese refugees in Washington?

D. Reconvene as a whole group. Facilitate a discussion using these questions: What are other ways historians learn about the past? What role does oral history play compared to other ways of learning?

Activity 4: Resettlement Experiences in Washington

Teachers can choose one or more of the following options to assess student learning:

A. **Option 1: Explanatory Essay.** Have students write an informative/explanatory essay on the resettlement experiences of Southeast Asian refugees in Washington. Have students address the following questions:

1. Why did refugees resettle in Washington?
2. What challenges did they face in rebuilding their lives in Washington?
3. What support did they have in rebuilding their lives in Washington?

B. **Option 2: Comic or Visual Illustration.** Have students create a comic or visual illustration documenting the journey of a Southeast Asian refugee from the end of the Vietnam War to resettling in Washington. The comic can have fictional elements, but should be based on facts. Encourage students to refer to the essay, video, and oral history sources in creating the narrative. Tell students that their comics should explain:

1. How the refugees ended up in Washington.
2. Challenges they faced along their journey.
3. Support and successes along their journey.

Extension Activity

A. **Oral History Interview.** Remind students of the oral history they listened to in Activity 3. Have them listen again to the “[I heard on the loudspeaker that they call us refugees](#)” interview and focus on what questions PhuongChi Nguyen (the interviewer) asks her parents.

1. Ask students the following questions:
 - a. Why do you think she asked those questions?
 - b. What makes a good question?
2. Ask students: what is the difference between these two questions?: “Did you have a good lunch?” and “Can you tell me about lunch today?”

3. Tell students that a close-ended question can be answered with yes/no or a few words. An open-ended requires a person to say more and give more information or details. Ask students which type of question would be more helpful in an oral history interview.
4. Have students make a list of interview questions they would ask a Southeast Asian American refugee.
5. Have a discussion about how to approach interviews with care, as sensitive topics may come up and past traumas may surface. Encourage students to ask general questions about experiences (i.e., “What was it like growing up in Seattle?”) that allow interviewees to choose what to share.
6. Reach out to local community organizations or businesses to connect students with people to interview, virtually or in-person. Have students conduct interviews with community members.
7. Have students decide how to share their oral histories (i.e., audio, video, written transcript, written document, etc.).
8. Have students share their oral histories in small groups or with the whole class.

B. Field Trip. Host a field trip to a Washington-based site with APIDA history like the Wing Luke Museum in the Seattle Chinatown-International District.

1. Have students research current exhibitions online before visiting.
2. Have students make a list of questions they have or things they would like to see at the museum before visiting.
3. Facilitate an after-event discussion by asking students about what they learned and the connections they made to the lesson.

Further Information

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Resettlement of Southeast Asian Refugees in Washington State (Secondary)”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/sea-refugees-washington.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Southeast Asian Refugees”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/southeast-asian-refugees.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Southern California”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/vietnamese-refugees-in-socal.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Cambodian Refugees in the United States”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/cambodian-refugees.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Asian Americans Serving and Fighting in the Vietnam War”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-americans-serving-and-fighting-in-vietnam-war.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Asian American Veterans and the Anti-War Movement”: <https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-american-veterans-and-anti-war-movement.html>