

Blog

Educational Materials

A Guide to Teaching Historiography to Elementary & Secondary Students

The purpose of this guide is to:

1. Define and Identify the key elements of historiography
2. Assist instructors with conceptualizing the variety of ways historiography can be taught
3. Provide a rationale for teaching historiography in K-12 education
4. Introduce a taxonomy of historiography
5. Provide lesson plans that include learning outcomes, exercises, and assessments
6. Share a [PowerPoint presentation on understanding and teaching historiography \[link\]](#)

Historiography

Historiography is the study of how historical narratives are written. It examines and critiques the sources that are used in narratives and how authors use them. It critiques the way authors select information, interpret documents, events, motivations, and assign meaning and significance to them. It also explores authors' biases and sensitivity to the context in which events occurred and documents were written.

Historiography is about getting to the truth of history. It does not presume that history is an exact science, nor does it aspire to become one. Instead, it recognizes the limitations of both evidence and authors. Evidence is vital to the historical narrative and may consist of institutional documents, treaties, literature, sacred text, artifacts, diaries, letters, eye-witness accounts, newspapers, Newspapers, magazines, and media broadcasts. Evidence is often fragile in the sense that it can be interpreted in several ways, or lack enough content to make credible conclusions about its meaning, or specious in its accounts. Evidence, including forensic material, can also be lost or destroyed.

Authors sometimes have agendas. They may want to glorify a nation and its heroes so that citizens will rally to defend national interests. They may want to demonstrate the role of wealth in driving national and international policies. There are many approach to writing history and these are often called "schools" of historiography. These schools include:

- **Orthodox/Traditional:** Generally nationalistic in its outlook; focuses on heroes that represent material achievements, leadership, conquest, and the nation's virtues and spirit
- **Marxist:** Views the past as an ongoing conflict between economic classes and focuses on the economic motives and causes for national policies, laws, wars, and institutional behavior
- **Revisionist:** Typically this approach is a corrective response to the orthodox school as it expands the historical narrative to include the experiences and voices of populations previously marginalized, and presents a broader scope of interpreting and critiquing national conduct and it impact on people
- **Theodicy:** Presents history as a chronology of progress towards a divine objective and attributes the achievements of society to the will of God and the role of God in human activity
- **Feminist:** Views the past as product of male dominance and patriarchal world view; seeks to reconfigure historical narratives so they include previously marginalized experiences and perspectives of women
- **Critical Theory:** This is a philosophical approach to all subjects including history that examines the role of power as it impacts art, literature, historical narratives, governance, and institutional policies.

The schools of historiography are well-represented in American scholarship. Here are some examples:

- **Orthodox:** Thomas A. Baily, author of *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 1940, *The American Pageant*, 1956, and over a dozen other books focused on presidents and international conflict. His work takes a nationalistic view of the past. Americans are vindicated in their actions as they represented a noble people intent on securing global democracy and material progress for all.
- **Marxist:** Philip S. Foner, author of *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 11 volumes, 1947-2022, and scores of texts on labor as it related to minorities, war, and social reform. His narratives illuminate how class privileges were reinforced by legislation and court decisions and how that impacted working class at home and abroad. They document the struggle of workers to obtain rights and fair wages and working conditions.
- **Revisionism:** Nikole Hannah-Jones, editor of *The 1619 Project*, 2021, revisits American colonial history and traces the evolution of slavery in North America. The narrative in the collection of essays present history from slaves' perspectives and examine aspects of slavery typically absent from orthodox accounts, including resistance and spirituality. It places slavery at the center of American culture and economics and posits that American prosperity and attitudes toward non-Whites is owed to slavery.
- **Theodicy:** George Bancroft, author of *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the American Continent*, 8 volumes, 1854-1860 (with numerous editions), exemplifies the 19th century Puritan influence on scholarship. Bancroft was also a poet, Secretary of the navy under President Polk, and diplomat. His narratives suggest that God chose the U.S. to be a moral beacon to the world. His Christian nationalist perspective blends orthodoxy with eschatological visions.
- **Feminist:** Sara Margaret Evens, author of *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (1979) and *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (2003), exemplifies two central elements in feminist history 1) The restoration of women's experiences and voices to accounts of the past; 2) a reinterpretation of history that challenges the traditional, patriarchal understandings of the meaning and significance of events are monolithic and the product of objective scholarship.
- **Critical Theory:** Edward Said's *Orientalism*, 1978, and *Culture and Imperialism*, 1994, explored the biases, assumptions, and misunderstandings in Western historical traditions. The texts were not so much a chronological narrative as they were an evaluation of Western historiography and its impact on society.

Elements and Criteria of Historiography

Historiography examines the following elements of historical narratives and accounts:

Purpose	Audience	Context	Source	Concepts	Perspective
•Is the author writing history to objectively report, or to criticize, persuade, flatter?	•Who will read the author's work and how might the intended audience influence the narrative?	•What is the socio-political milieu in which the author is writing and how might that influence the narrative?	•What sources does the author use to compose the narrative? •Are they credible? •Are they reliable?	•What concepts are vital in the narrative? •Has the meaning of these concepts changed over time?	•Is the author objective? •What are the special interests of the author and how might they impact the narrative?

Using the following criteria, historiography evaluates the quality of narratives and accounts:

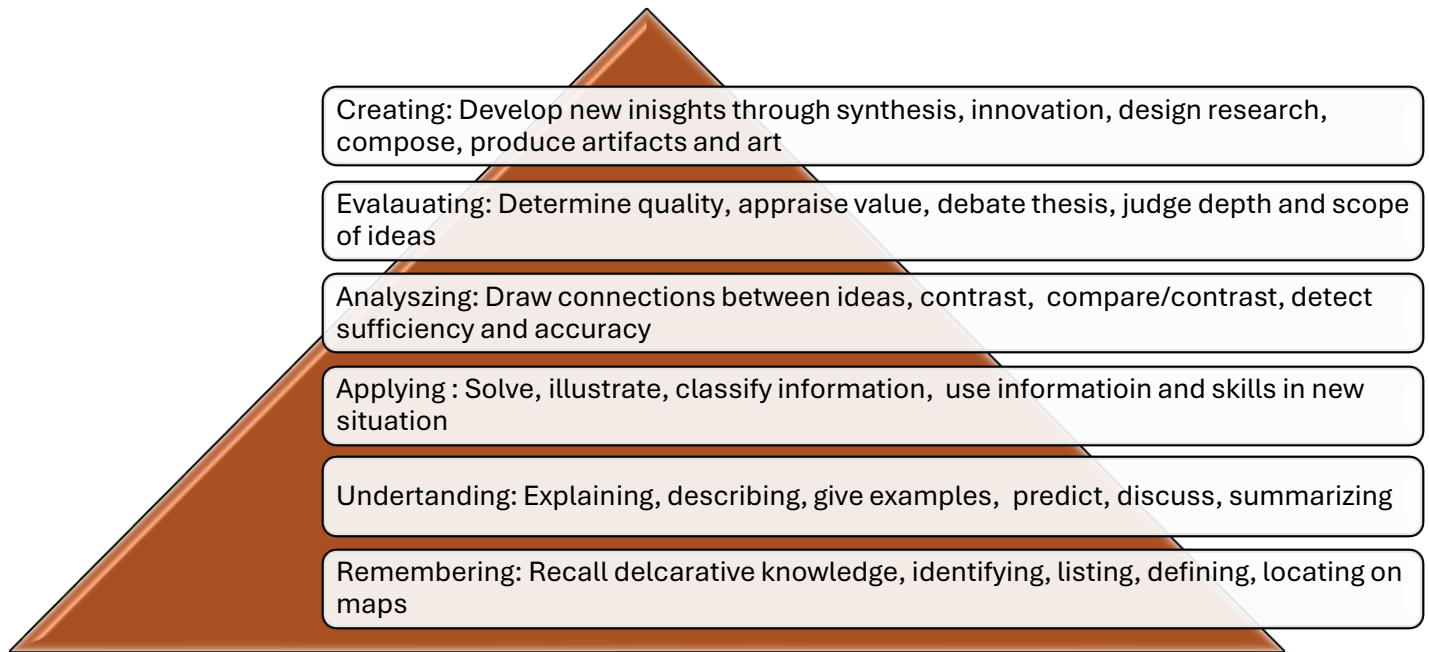
Criteria	Considerations
Credibility	1. Are sources authentic? 2. Are they fraudulent or anachronistic?
Reliability	1. Are the sources accurate and trustworthy? 2. Do other sources corroborate the sources?
Clarity	1. Is the narrative transparent? Is the purpose evident? 2. Is it logically organized? 3. Does it have adequate detail?
Bias	1. Does the account/narrative omit key facts and details? 2. Does the account/narrative favor certain perspective and ignore others? 3. Does it flatter some and castigate others?
Evidence	1. Are assertions supported with sufficient and relevant evidence? 2. Is the evidence adequately explained?
Logic	1. Are explanations of cause-effect rationale? 2. Are insights to the significance and meaning of the subject reasonable given the evidence provided?

What is the Rationale for Teaching Historiography to K-12 Students?

1. It supports the development of critical thinking and critical reading
2. It helps students understand that history is not an exact science
3. It helps students understand how different ways of reporting things can influence people's lives
4. It encourages them to think about the meaning and value of past and current events from multiple perspectives, which is essential to build compassion for others
5. It helps them understand that being an expert in a subject means being a careful researcher

A Taxonomy of Historiography

Learning taxonomies identify levels of learning according to the complexity and difficulty of cognitive tasks. The taxonomy here is based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000). The taxonomy applies equally to all grade levels and adult education. The cognitive tasks remain stable, but as learner progress, the difficulty and complexity of tasks at each level of the taxonomy increases as illustrated in the lesson plans that follow.



Lesson Plans for Grades 7-8

When teachers may begin lessons in historiography depends on the readiness of students and the willingness of the administration and faculty to support these lessons. Consider the following:

- Have teachers been well-trained in historiography and student-centered learning strategies?
- Is the administration prepared to respond to parental objections to thinking about biases in historical narratives?
- Will sufficient time be dedicated to the lessons so that students can experience deep learning?

Learning Outcomes Grades 7-8:

1. Students will define history and historiography.
2. Students will identify the reason why history is important
3. Students will explain why how people tell stories matters in our society
4. Students will identify the differences between primary and secondary sources and explain why some sources are credible and reliable and some are not
5. Students will identify the choices that historians have to make when they write about something in the past
6. Students will identify different reasons why historians write history and explain the difference between objective and subjective stories
7. Students will compare and contrast narratives to detect use of evidence and biases

Strategies for Achieving Learning Outcomes Grades 7-8 Mapped to Taxonomy

Outcome Number	Level of Taxonomy	Strategies	Minimum Time
One	Remember Understand	• Class brainstorm: "what is history?" Discuss and add clarifying points • Class brainstorm: "what is historiography?" Discuss and clarify with examples drawn from student input and suggestions when needed	20-35 min.
Two	Understand	• Review previous lesson	20-35 min.

		- Class reflection & discussion: write down a story about the past that you remember; it could be from your family or something that happened in your neighborhood; write down why it was important - Follow up with discussion about why our stories matter (coax students to see how it helps us understand why the world is the way it is, why people struggle, how people can solve problems, etc.	
Three	Understand	- Review previous lesson - Exercise: “Whose Story Is This?” Students read quietly a short account of something that happened in the past and answer questions about it when they finish. This is followed by guided discussion. Half the students got one version and half got a second version (but they did not know about two versions) See Appendix A “Reading Exercise: The Struggle for Women’s Right to Vote”	30-45 min.
Four	Applying	- Review previous lesson - Create a timeline that identifies key events on the path to women’s voting rights	20 min.
Five	Analyzing	- Compare and contrast the first and second versions of the women’s suffrage movements - Compare and contrast the ways different groups of suffragettes thought about human rights	30-40 min.
Six	Evaluating	Which version of The Struggle for Women’s Right to Vote do you think is better? Why?	20 min
Seven	Creating	What would you do to improve the narratives so that readers could understand more about the Suffragette Movement?	20 min.

Appendix A

Reading Exercise: The Struggle for Women’s Right to Vote [[Create Link to the PDF Historiography. Appendix A. The Struggle for Women’s right to Vote](#)]

Directions

Distribute the two stories to students and provide 15-20 minutes for them to read the stories and respond to the questions that follow. Dedicate 20 minutes or more to discussing their answers. Coax them to use examples to support their responses. You might need to define terms such as “suffrage” and “suffragette,” and clarify the difference between federal/national laws and state laws. Make references to what students learned in this exercise in future lessons to reinforce their memory and understanding of history and why it is important to think about whether historical narratives are biased and accurate.

The Struggle for Women’s Right to Vote (First Version)

The movement for women’s suffrage in the United States began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 in New York. At the time women did not have the right to vote. At the convention, men and women talked about how to change this. Many men believed that women were not smart enough to make good decisions. Some believed that God did not want women to have the power to make laws. Sometimes men and women made fun of the women who fought for the right to vote. The struggle was for a good cause. It improved American democracy.

In 1866, a group of men and women formed the American Equal Rights Association. Lucretia Mott was president and Susan B. Anthony and Henry Blackwell were secretaries. Association members did not agree on everything.

Some wanted the group to fight for the 14th Amendment. The new law would give Black males the right to vote. In 1969, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony foolishly left the group. They formed the National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA). Their group did not want to fight for the 14th Amendment. They wanted to focus on a national amendment for women's votes. They also wanted more divorce rights for women. They were against the sale of alcohol. Those who disagreed with them created the American Women's Suffrage Association (AWSA). They supported the 14th Amendment. They wanted states to decide whether women could vote. Many thought that the ideas of the NWSA were too extreme.

In 1890, the NWSA united with the AWSA. It was a wise move. Few people today would do the same thing. The new group became the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The new group wanted a national amendment to give women the vote. It asked senators and representative for support. It got help from community centers and businesses. The group also had enemies.

In 1911, a group of wealthy women and Catholic priests formed the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS). This association believed that women's suffrage was dangerous. It's members believed that the country would not be better with women's votes. Many in NAOWS believed that if women got the right to vote, they would lose their femininity. The suffragettes did not give up. NAWSA held a march for women's in votes in Washington, D.C. There were over 8,000 marchers. Some men who watched the march threw bottles and garbage at the women. The brave women finally got the vote in 1920 when Congress passed the 19th Amendment.

The Struggle for Women's Right to Vote (Second Version)

The movement for women's suffrage in the United States began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 in New York. At the time women did not have the right to vote. At the convention, men and women talked about how to change this. Many men believed that women were not smart enough to make good decisions. Some believed that God did not want women to have the power to make laws. Sometimes men and women made fun of the women who fought for the right to vote. Many women believed their lives would get better if they could vote.

In 1866, a group of men and women formed the American Equal Rights Association. Association members did not agree on everything. Some wanted the group to fight for the 14th Amendment. The new law would give Black males the right to vote. In 1969, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony left the group. They formed the National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA). Their group did not want to fight for the 14th Amendment. They focused on a national amendment for women's votes. They also wanted more divorce rights for women. They were against the sale of alcohol. Those who disagreed with them created the American Women's Suffrage Association (AWSA). They supported the 14th Amendment. They wanted states to decide whether women could vote. Many thought that the ideas of the NWSA were too extreme.

In 1890, the NWSA united with the AWSA. The new group became the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The new group wanted a national amendment to give women the vote. It asked senators and representative for support. It got help from community centers and businesses. It got help from women working in factories who joined women's trade unions. The NAWSA was not always open to all women. Many of its members did not want to work with Black women. In 1896, Ida B. Well-Barnett, Frances E. W. Harper, and others formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). The group worked for women's right to vote. They also worked to improve Black education and employment opportunities.

Suffragettes had many enemies. In 1911, a group of wealthy women and Catholic priests formed the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS). This association believed that women's suffrage was dangerous. Its members believed that the country would not be better with women's votes. Many in NAOWS believed that if women got the right to vote, they would lose their femininity. NAWSA held a march for women's in votes in Washington, D.C. There were over 8,000 marchers. Some men who watched the march threw bottles and garbage at the women.

World War I started in 1914. The war gave women the chance to prove they were patriotic. NAWSA pledged to President Wilson that it would give him resources and volunteers to help win the war. This caused Wilson to support the suffragettes. Women won the vote in 1920, when Congress passed the 19th Amendment.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the purpose of the two versions of the story are more alike or very different from each other? Why?
2. Which version includes clear biases or opinions about the past and what people did? Provide examples.
3. Which version of the story provides more details? Give examples.
4. What difference do the details make in telling the story of Suffrage Movement? Think about how the details influence your understanding of the movement. Think about how the details impact the way you feel about the movement.
5. What details could have been added to help the reader understand the Suffrage Movement?

Discussion Tips for Teachers:

- Version one contains biases that are rather obvious. The first paragraph asserts the struggle was a “good cause.” That may be true for some people, but it is not an objective statement and so is not appropriate in a historical account. Whether the movement “improved American democracy” is also debatable. It may be challenging to make these points because many students have strong feeling about what was right and wrong in history. The key is to help them understand that the historians job is not to tell student what was right and wrong, but to present as much information as possible about what happened, why it happened, who was involved, why they were involved, what the consequences followed which actions, what the events meant at the time, and why those events are significant now. With this information, students can autonomously determine right and wrong.
- The second paragraph states that Stanton and Anthony “foolishly” left the American Equal Rights Association. Not only is that a judgment, but like the biases in the first paragraph, the author provides no evidence to support the claim.
- In the third paragraph, the author states that it was wise for the NWSA to unite with the AWSA, but does not say why. It also says nothing about why come at the time might have considered that a bad move. The paragraph also asserts that “not many people would do the same thing.” It is an ambiguous statement. Does it refer to the act of uniting groups in conflict? Does it refer to the courage it took to overcome differences? The statement also offers no insight as to why the unification was either beneficial or detrimental at the time.
- Version two has more details about who supported the movement, how the movement was racist, and how the movement used World War I to get the president's support for women's suffrage. The discussion about why the details matter is crucial for students to appreciate how omitted facts and perspectives can influence what they think happened in the past and why it matters. Coax students to think about whether it

mattered that some suffragettes were racist and why the 19th Amendment passed even though some suffragettes were racist.

- Help students to contextualize the movement. Remember that by 1920, the Supreme Court sanctioned segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and that the Ku Klux Klan was very active at the time. Remember that religious traditions tended to support the idea that women were inferior to men and should obey their husbands, and that men could assault their wives without legal consequences. Remember that racism in the U.S. could be found everywhere in ads, textbooks, movies, songs, history curricula, and religious sermons. At the time, Native Americans were not considered citizens of the U.S., job announcements openly told Jews and Catholics not to apply, and anti-immigration feelings were underscored by immigration quotas in 1921 and 1924.
- Student might have lots of questions about the movement based on what they read that was not well explained. For example: neither version tells readers much about the individuals they named; neither version reveals the Constitution's explicit reference to men when talking about rights, and neither exposes much about restrictions on women's rights as single and married women. Students might have questions about opposition to the movement. It is important to remind them that opposition was not just something undertaken by men. Lots of women liked being excused from political decision-making and worried that the vote would be redundant because women would just vote how their husbands told them to vote. The industrial revolution brought women into the work force where they faced discrimination, poor working conditions, sexual harassment and low wages, which inspired many to join the suffragettes so they could vote to change these things. Middle class and wealthy women had more leisure time and money to devote to the movement and many were adamant about changing the appalling conditions in factories, shops, mills, sanitation, and housing.

Appendix B

Origins of the War in Vietnam, 1945- 1965

Version One (737 words) [\[Create a Link to PDF Historiography. Appendix B. Version One Origins of the War in Vietnam\]](#)

The Vietnam War represents America's dedication to democracy during the Cold War. It began after World War II ended, when the French declared their right to govern Vietnam as they had before the war. In 1946 Vietnamese communists, the Viet Minh, rejected the French and demanded independence. The leader of the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh, raised an army to resist the French. The United States supported France, and in 1950, it began to send military supplies and advisors to help them. The defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 resulted in the partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel. North Vietnam became a communist nation led by Ho Chi Minh, while South Vietnam became a democratic republic led by Ngo Dinh Diem.

The division was not acceptable to radicals who wanted to unite Vietnam under a communist government. They were supported by China and the Soviet Union. It also was unacceptable to Americans and their allies. They believed in the "domino theory" that if Vietnam became communist, then communism would spread all over Asia. In 1947, the Truman Doctrine declared that the U.S. was committed to stopping communism from spreading. That commitment led to war and the loss of over 58,000 American lives.

Between 1955 and 1963, South Vietnam struggled to be a democracy. Diem's government was corrupt and limited some civil rights. The U.S. continued to support Diem because he was committed to fighting communism. During this time, the Viet Minh built military supply routes in Laos and Cambodia to enable strikes against Diem's government. Some people in South Vietnam lost confidence in Diem and supported Ho Chi Minh. In 1960, anti-government activists in South Vietnam formed the National Liberation Front (NFL). It supported the unification of Vietnam under communism and it created its own militia. The U.S. referred to NFL members as Viet Cong and saw them as a serious threat to democracy in Asia.

In 1961, President Kennedy sent military supplies, helicopters, and Green Berets (special U.S. Army forces) to assist the South Vietnamese in their fight against North Vietnam and communism. Kennedy promised in his Inaugural Speech that the U.S. would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." Americans were proud of this declaration as they saw the U.S. as the leader of all free nations and world's greatest defender of democracy. Kennedy's administration was aware of the risk of declaring war on North Vietnam. He also believed that it would not be good for the world if communism were allowed to spread all over Southeast Asia. His cabinet members and advisors knew that China and the Soviet Union — both communist countries — supported North Vietnam and might enter the war with grave consequences as both had nuclear weapons.

Tragically, in 1963, Diem was assassinated by soldiers led by Duong Van Minh, a general in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The coup brought instability to South Vietnam. Diem's successors were not effective in repelling the North Vietnamese army nor the Viet Cong who supported them. Twenty days after Diem's death, Kennedy was murdered in Dallas Texas. As the nation mourned the loss of a great leader, Lyndon Johnson became president. He inherited the moral obligation to prevent the expansion of communism in Asia.

Johnson was determined to defeat the communists in Vietnam, but he struggled with the idea of escalating the war. Many Americans did not know where Vietnam was or why it was important. Johnson also understood that a war would be costly. In August 1964, the *USS Maddox*, a destroyer ship patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam was attacked twice by a North Vietnamese torpedo boat. Johnson bravely authorized air strikes on North Vietnamese naval bases and two U.S. planes were shot down. Johnson then made the difficult decision to ask Congress for permission to take any measures necessary to combat communist aggression in the region. Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the U.S. increased its commitment to send soldiers and supplies to South Vietnam in its defense. Many regard 1965 as the first year of the Vietnam War because for the first time in the conflict, thousands of combat troops were sent to engage the enemy on the ground, side by side with South Vietnamese soldiers to fight for their freedom.

Version Two (761 words) [Create a Link to PDF Historiography. Appendix B. Version Two Origins of the War in Vietnam]

The Vietnam War began after World War II ended, when the French demanded that Vietnam be restored to its former status as a French colony. In 1946, the Viet Minh (a communist league for independence), rejected the French and demanded independence. Viet Minh leader, Ho Chi Minh, appealed to President Truman to intervene. He thought the U.S. would defend Vietnam's right to independence and self-governance (Letter from Ho Chi Minh, 1946). He also raised an army to resist the French. The U.S. supported France, and in 1950, it began to send

military supplies and advisors to help them. The defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 resulted in the partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel. North Vietnam became a communist nation led by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam became a democratic republic led by Ngo Dinh Diem. Many South Vietnamese saw Diem as a U.S. puppet of U.S. imperialism. Some Americans understood the depth of Vietnamese anti-imperialism. President Eisenhower observed that had elections been held in 1954, 80 percent of all Vietnamese would have voted for Ho Chi Minh (Jacobs, 2006).

The division was not acceptable to the Viet Minh. It wanted to unite Vietnam. It also was unacceptable to Americans. They believed in the “domino theory” that if Vietnam became communist, then communism would spread all over Asia. In 1947, the Truman Doctrine declared that the U.S. was committed to stopping communism from spreading. That commitment led to war and the loss of over 58,000 American lives and 2.5 million Asian lives (Rummel, 1998).

Between 1955 and 1963, South Vietnam struggled to be a democracy. Diem’s government was corrupt. It sold government positions to individuals, put people on military payrolls that did not work there, and suppressed his political competition. Diem was ineffective in his efforts to distribute more land to the poor, and he also persecuted Buddhists (Jacobs, 2006). The U.S. supported Diem because he opposed communism. During this time, the Viet Minh built military supply routes in Laos and Cambodia to enable strikes against Diem’s government. In 1960, South Vietnamese activists against Diem formed the National Liberation Front (NFL). It supported Ho Chi Minh and it created its own militia. The U.S. referred to NFL members as Viet Cong and saw them as a threat to democracy in Asia.

In 1961, President Kennedy sent military supplies, helicopters, and Green Berets (special U.S. Army forces) to assist the South Vietnamese. Kennedy promised in his Inaugural Speech that the U.S. would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” He was under pressure to be tough on communism, but understood that actions in Vietnam could provoke China and the Soviet Union. Both were communist countries that supported North Vietnam and they had nuclear weapons.

In 1963, Diem was assassinated in a coup orchestrated by the CIA and led by Duong Van Minh, a general in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The intent of the coup was replace Diem with a leader who would be more effective in extinguishing communism in South Vietnam (Kennedy, 1963). Instead, it brought instability to the region. Diem’s successors were not effective in repelling the North Vietnamese army nor the Viet Cong who supported them. Twenty days after Diem’s death, Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, Texas, and Lyndon Johnson became president.

Johnson was determined to defeat the communists in Vietnam, but he struggled with the idea of escalating the war. Many Americans did not know where Vietnam was or why it was important. Johnson also understood that a war would be costly. In August 1964, the *USS Maddox*, a destroyer ship patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam was allegedly attacked twice by a North Vietnamese torpedo boat. Johnson authorized air strikes on North Vietnamese naval bases and two U.S. planes were shot down. Johnson then asked Congress for permission to take any measures necessary to combat communist aggression in the region. Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The war ultimately cost \$168 billion to wage and over \$270 billion more to care for war veterans (Amadeo, 2024). Many historians regard 1965 as the year the Vietnam War began because that is when the first waves of American troops were sent to fight alongside the ARVN. It was also the first time that Americans bombed

North Vietnam. In the next seven years, the U.S. sent over 500,000 soldiers to fight and widened the war by bombing Laos and Cambodia.

Appendix C

[Create a Link to Historiography. Appendix C. Student Questions: Origins of the War in Vietnam]

Questions for Students on The Origins of the War in Vietnam, 1945-1965

1. What specific points do these two versions of the origins of the Vietnam War have in common?
2. What historical points are unique to the first version, and which are unique to the second version?
3. Do these accounts of history contain any biases? If so, what are they?
4. Do the differences in their content impact the way readers might interpret the history? Explain.
5. Do these two accounts have common purpose? Explain.
6. Are all the details in these accounts relevant to the matter of the Vietnam War's origins? Explain.
7. What difference does it make that the second version included references to scholarly work?
8. What questions about the origins of the Vietnam War might emerge as a result of reading these versions of history and why do they matter?
9. Which version do you think provides a better description of how the war in Vietnam evolved? Why?
10. What does this exercise teach you about historiography and the importance of understanding something about who wrote the historical narrative and for what purpose they wrote it?

Appendix D

Teacher's Guide to Discussion about Two Versions of the Vietnam War's Origins

Directions

Instructors may have students respond to discussion questions in a variety of ways:

- Allow time for students to quietly and individually respond to the questions, then discussion things as a class
- Allow students to answer the questions in groups and then facilitate a class discussion
- Facilitate a class discussion one question at a time without individual or group reflection
- Allow students to answer questions as home then facilitate class discussion

Considerations for Each Question

1. Both accounts agree on these matters:
 - a. The war in Vietnam was the result of conflict over French colonialism and communism after WWII
 - b. Dien Bien Phu was a turning point
 - c. During the cold War, American presidents were strongly anti-communist
 - d. The U.S. was technically involved in armed conflict over the fate of Vietnam before 1960
 - e. Communism existed in both North and South Vietnam
 - f. Ngo Dinh Diem was corrupt and was ultimately assassinated
 - g. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was a turning point that escalated the war

- h. Two U.S. planes were shot down as they bombed naval ports in North Vietnam in 1964
 - i. The decision of the U.S. to escalate the war considered the possibility that China and the Soviet Union might increase their efforts to defend the communists
 - j. That the US lost 58,000 lives in the war
2. The unique historical points that are unique to the first version include: That Vietnam was once ruled by France; How Americans felt about Kennedy's promise to defend democracy around the world; and that the nation mourned Kennedy's death. The points unique to the second version include:
- a. That many South Vietnamese saw Diem as an American puppet
 - b. That President Eisenhower believed most Vietnamese supported communism in 1954
 - c. That 2.5 million Asians lost their lives in the war
 - d. Specific examples of Diem's failures and flaws
 - e. That Diem's assassination was orchestrated by the CIA
 - f. That the intention of the coup was to have a stronger president in South Vietnam
 - g. That escalation of the war in 1965 involved bombing North Vietnam
 - h. That Americans eventually attacked targets in Laos and Cambodia
 - i. The financial costs of the war (excluding its impact on US debt and other aspects of the US economy)
3. Biases can be detected in word choice, the details that are included in the narrative, and which participants in past events get quoted and which do not. In this exercise:
- a. Version One calls the Vietnamese communists "radicals," which is a matter of opinion
 - b. Version One refers to the assassination of Diem a tragedy and that could be interpreted as the author's belief that Diem and democracy should have prevailed in South Vietnam
 - c. Version One say that Johnson "bravely" authorized air strikes against North Vietnam, which suggests the author believes Johnson was acting heroically
 - d. Version One says that Johnson inherited a "moral obligation" to prevent the spread of communism, which implies that the U.S. agenda in Vietnam was righteous and virtuous. This is contested by the fact that the Vietnamese did not see communism as a bad thing and saw imperious intervention in domestic affairs as a bad thing.
 - e. Version Two uses the term "allegedly" when recalling the 1964 incident with the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin, which implies that there is doubt that the North Vietnamese attacked the Maddox
4. When asking how the accounts might impact how readers see history, consider the following"
- a. Do the details have the potential to spark sympathy for one side of the conflict or the other?
 - b. Do the details have the potential to alert readers to the possibility that history is more complicated than how some authors present it?
 - c. Do the details have the potential to discredit popular stereotypes about the past and the people who made key decisions in the past?
5. Remember that even when narratives have things in common, they are not necessarily accurate or fair. It is possible to have several accounts of the same thing that share the same biases and that omit the same details. It is important that students understand that, generally, the consistency of eye-witness accounts and primary resources strengthens the likelihood that they accurately represent what happened.
6. The first version reports that Americans were proud to be leaders of free nations, and many were, this detail however may not be relevant to the central purpose of this account if it does not explain whether American attitudes about being a global defender of democracy contributed to the origins of the war in Vietnam. Many readers may assume that attitudes contributed something, and they might be correct; however, they might also be wrong. In order to know, historians would have to examine whether Americans understood that defend

democracy around the world meant sending U.S. troops to fight in other countries on a regular basis, and whether there existed a significant percentage of Americans who dissented from Kennedy's promise.

7. Help students understand the role of references to scholarly work and why they matter. These references not only point readers to documents that support assertions, but provide additional information for readers who want to dig deeper into the subject and learn more about matters that appear in their readings.
8. The prompt about what questions might emerge as a result of reading these accounts about Vietnam invites students to pay attention to the implications of the narrative and sensitive to differences in the content of each narrative. For example:
 - a. Version Two mentions the role of the CIA in diem's assignation and Version One does not, which suggests alerts students to the possibility that their own government felt justified in determining who would be a foreign country's president. A potential question regarding the matter could be whether the U.S. was sincere about promoting democracy, or whether it encouraged nations to be democratic only if those nations elected leaders who did what the U.S. wanted them to do.
 - b. The ambiguity about the attack on the USS Maddox in Version Two raises the question of whether the North Vietnamese really attacked the U.S. ship and/or whether President Johnson and people advising him were look for an excuse to start a war. War is profitable for certain industries. Corporations with government contracts can set high prices for tanks, planes, guns, uniforms, boots, medical supplies, communication technologies, construction of air strips and military bases and ports, ships, and food supplies for soldiers. Bell Helicopter, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Dow Chemical, and General Dynamics were among the companies that made substantial profits as a result of the war in Vietnam (Wiedenbaum, Murray L. "The Military Industrial Complex: An Analysis." In Omer L. Carey (Ed.) *The Military Industrial Complex and American Foreign Policy*, 29-41. Washington State University Press, 1969)
 - c. Version two mentions the cost of war and some may want to know more about that. The cost of war is astronomical and is a burden born mainly by taxpayers who not only pay taxes, but fight the wars and are killed and injured, but who suffer the effects of inflation and unemployment that often happens during wars. War shifts public spending toward the production of weapons, supplies, wartime construction, transportation of personnel and materials, and care of the injured and away from other public works and programs such as education, public health care, services for the elderly, and maintenance of infrastructures such as road and sanitation.
9. The question of which version of the war is better may spark heated debate because of perceived biases in each version. Instructors may be challenged to help students differentiate between authors' biases and facts about the war that readers do not like. Students may be tempted to think that narratives are automatically better because they contain more information, but this is not necessarily true. Some narratives are repetitive and biased, and some contain a broad scope of information but very little depth and insights to what was significant or meaningful.
10. When discussing what students learned in the exercise, help them focus on the academic skills they need to read narratives effectively and critically and also on what they might have discovered about their own assumptions and attitudes that might have an adverse or positive impact on their understanding of history.

Key Follow-Ups To the Lessons and Exercise

- Integrate questions about readings that will prompt their recall of what they learned about in the lessons
- Use the language of historiographers in subsequent lessons

- Test students' proficiency with critical reading of history by including a short reading exercise on an exam where students read then answer questions about the text that assess how well they detect key elements of the text that historians would attend. See the example in Appendix E.

Appendix E

[Create a Link to PDF Historiography. Appendix E. Student Assessment]

Assessing Students' Proficiency with Critical Reading of History

Directions

Read the following narrative and use complete sentences to answer the questions that follow.

The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The path to lowering the voting age in the United States from 21 to 18 was peppered with debate that was often influenced by the tumultuous events of the 1960s. At the center of the debate on whether 18-year olds should vote was the matter of the draft and men's obligation to fight wars. The matter was resolved in 1971 as the war in Vietnam was coming to a close.

The idea of allowing 18-year-olds the vote was first considered in World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt lowered the draft age from 21 to 18. This Congressional interest in lowering the voting age. Though he disliked the idea of linking voting rights to fighting in wars, in 1954, President Eisenhower called for Congress to lower the voting age. The argument that 18-year-olds should vote because they were drafted into the U.S. armed forces alarmed people because they thought it would lead to drafting women to fight. The argument was also insulting to African Americans who were old enough to vote in 1954. At the time, many Southern states used literacy tests, harassment, assault, and lynching to prevent them from voting and registering to vote.

War, anti-war protests, and social unrest over racism, police brutality, and poverty drew many people between the ages of 18 and 25 into political activism in the 1960s. Many believed that the 26th Amendment would allow them to legislate sweeping reforms that would end discrimination, war, and poverty. The war in Vietnam amplified demands to lower the voting age. Males 18 and older were being drafted to fight in Vietnam and thousands lost their lives and were disabled in combat. They argued "old enough to fight, old enough to vote!" Others believed that since millions of men and women over the age of 16 were in the labor force and paying taxes, they had an interest in who governed them.

Those who opposed the 26th Amendment claimed that 18-year-olds were too immature to vote. Representative Emanuel Celler (D-NY) declared that while 18-year-olds had enough good judgement to fight in wars, they lacked the good judgment necessary to make wise decisions concerning governance. During the 1960s, anti-war and civil rights demonstrations proliferated in the streets and on college campuses. Some lawmakers rightfully saw this as evidence that these long-haired 18-year-old hippies were too radical to have the vote.

1. Whose voices are used to provide this account of the struggle for the 26th Amendment? Whose voices are omitted and what might they contribute to the narrative?
2. Does the last paragraph reveal about the author's potential bias?

3. Does the author establish a clear cause-effect relationship between the war and the ratification of the 26th Amendment? Explain.

Evaluating the Answers

1. Note that the voices referenced in the essay are all white, male, and over the age of 35. Readers might understand more what the vote represented in the US at the time if more voices were added to the account.
2. The last paragraph suggests that law-makers were correct in withholding support for lowering the voting age. The stereotype of 18-year-olds as long-haired hippies leaves the impression that all youth were rebellious and counter-culture. Many who dissented from the federal government's policies and actions were clean-cut young adults who wore suits and dresses, and who felt uneasy around drug users and those who used violence to articulate their objections to the war, poverty, and discrimination.
3. Since there is little in this narrative that explains how the 26th Amendment was introduced, debated and passed in 1971, it is not possible to prove a clear cause-effect relationship between the war and the ratification of the Amendment.

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