

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Lesson Title –My Lai Massacre Round Robin
from Michael Meyer

Grade –High School

Length of class period – 60 minutes

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

What is the effect of guerilla war on civilians, soldiers and countries?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will analyze political cartoons, transcripts, photos, and reports.

Students will make connections between historical events.

Students will weigh the gravitas of events of history.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)

Seven Primary Sources concerning the My Lai Massacre (attached in lesson folder)

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

Students will look at seven different primary sources and answer questions about them in small groups, then discuss their answers with a class sized group.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

Collecting the answered questions and grade for effort and if they added to their answers during discussion.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

Educational experiences in **Grades 9-12** will assure that students:

- Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.
- Access and gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.
- Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources
- Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations



Women and children in My Lai, Vietnam, shortly before US soldiers shot and killed them

EXCERPT FROM NY TIMES ARTICLE PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 17 1969

Villagers' Account

As said by one of the villagers, Do Hoai, in the presence and with the assent of a number of others, this is what happened:

A heavy artillery barrage awakened the villagers, around 6 A.M. It lasted for an hour, then American soldiers entered the village meeting no opposition. They ordered all inhabitants out of their homes.

Although the area had been largely under Vietcong control, the villagers had engaged in no hostile action against the Americans and bore no arms.

The Americans forced the villagers to gather in one place in each of the three clusters of houses that formed part of the village of Songmy. The settlements bore the names of Tucong, Dinhong and Myhoi.

The three death sites were about 200 yards apart.

When the houses had been cleared, the troops dynamited those made of brick and set fire to the wooden structures. They did not speak to the villagers and were not accompanied by an interpreter who could have explained their actions.

Then the Vietnamese were gunned down where they stood. About 20 soldiers performed the executions at each of the three places, using their individual weapons, presumably M-16 rifles.

In the interview, Colonel Khien said that the killings had probably been carried out by fewer soldiers than Mr. Hoai reported, but said he did not know the exact number.

Mr. Hoai, 40, a rice farmer like most of the villagers in this green and marshy area between the central highlands and the South China Sea, said that those who escaped the slaughter, as he and his wife did, had hidden under the bodies of victims until the Americans left. The whole incident, he said took about 15 minutes.

Mr. Hoai said that his mother, his older brother and the brother's three children had been killed.

A gaunt old woman, wearing the black pajamas and flat conic of Vietnamese peasants, interrupted to say that her 19 year-old son had also been killed.

A number of people in the crowd during the conversation at the edge of the new settlement said that Mr. Hoai's account was correct.

Part of the transcripts from the trial against Lt. Calley

The prosecution's final witness was its most anticipated witness. Paul Meadlo had been promised immunity from military prosecution in return for his testimony in the Calley case, but when he was called earlier in the trial, Meadlo had refused to answer questions about March 16, 1968, claiming his fifth amendment right not to incriminate himself. Daniel called Meadlo to the stand for a second time, and the ex-GI, who had lost a foot to a mine shortly after the massacre, limped to the stand in his green short-sleeve shirt and green pants. Judge Kennedy warned Meadlo that if he refused to answer questions, two U. S. marshals would take him into custody. Meadlo said he would testify. He told the jury that Calley had left him with a large group of mostly women and children south of the hamlet saying, "You know what to do with them, Meadlo." Meadlo thought Calley meant he should guard the people, which he did. Meadlo told the jury what happened when Calley returned a few minutes later:

He said, "How come they're not dead?" I said, I didn't know we were supposed to kill them." He said, I want them dead." He backed off twenty or thirty feet and started shooting into the people -- the Viet Cong -- shooting automatic. He was

beside me. He burned four or five magazines. I burned off a few, about three. I helped shoot 'em.

Q: What were the people doing after you shot them?

A: They were lying down.

Q: Why were they lying down?

A: They was mortally wounded.

Q: How were you feeling at that time?

A: I was mortally upset, scared, because of the briefing we had the day before.

Q: Were you crying?

A: I imagine I was....

Daniel then asked Meadlo about the massacre at the eastern drainage ditch, and in the same almost emotionless voice, Meadlo recounted the story, telling the jury that Calley fired from 250 to 300 bullets into the ditch. One exchange was remarkable:

Q: What were the children in the ditch doing?

A: I don't know.

Q: Were the babies in their mother's arms?

A: I guess so.

Q: And the babies moved to attack?

A: I expected at any moment they were about to make a counterbalance.

Q: Had they made any move to attack?

A: No.



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SP4 Justin (Haeberle B.M)



“and Babies” Poster created with a photo of the My Lai Massacre based on Mike Wallace’s interview with Paul Meadlo a soldier present at the Massacre. Below is a transcript.

Q. So you fired something like sixty-seven shots?

A. Right.

Q. And you killed how many? At that time?

A. Well, I fired them automatic, so you can’t- You just spray the area on them and so you can’t know how many you killed ‘cause they were going fast. So I might have killed ten or fifteen of them.

Q. Men, women, and children?

A. Men, women, and children.

Q. And babies?

A. And babies.

General Peers Summary Report of The My Lai Massacre

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is concluded that:

1. During the period of 16-19 March 1968, troops of Task Force Barker massacred a large number of Vietnamese nationals in the village of Son My.
2. Knowledge as to the extent of the incident existed at Company level, at least among the key staff officers and commander at the Task Force Barker level, and at the 11th Brigade command level.
3. Efforts at the American Division command level to conceal information concerning what was probably believed to be the killing of 20-28 civilians actually resulted in the suppression of a war crime of far greater magnitude.
4. The commander of the 11th Brigade, upon learning that a war crime had probably been committed, deliberately set out to conceal the fact from proper authority and to deceive his commander concerning the matter.
5. Investigations concerning the incident conducted within the American Division were superficial and misleading and not subjected to substantive review.
6. Efforts were made at every level of command from company to division to withhold and suppress information concerning the incident at Son My.
7. Failure of American Division headquarters personnel to act on information received from GVN/ARVN officials served to suppress effectively information concerning the Son My incident.
8. Efforts of the American Division to suppress and withhold information were assisted by US officers serving in advisory positions with Vietnamese agencies.

Vietnam Round Robin Activity Questions

I. Who are the men in the picture, what is their job and nationality?

What is the message of this cartoon?

II. What is your emotional reaction to this picture?

What could have driven these men to do this?

III. What is the significance of the lack of interpreter?

How did some of the victims evade the soldiers notice?

IV. What misunderstanding was there between Meadlo and Calley?

What justification does Meadlo make for shooting the babies in the southern drainage ditch? Why is the justification clearly incorrect?

V. What is the man doing in this picture?

Why is he doing it?

- VI. Why would this poster have been particularly popular among the anti-war population?

What does Mike Wallace reveal about Paul Meadlo in his interview?

- VII. Summarize in a short paragraph the conclusions that General Peers made based on his investigation of the My Lai Massacre.

Thought questions:

Have things like this, and worse, happened in other wars? List 2 examples.

Why do things like this happen in warfare?

Why did this event make such a big impact on the war when in the past similar events were brushed over or kept out of the spotlight?