

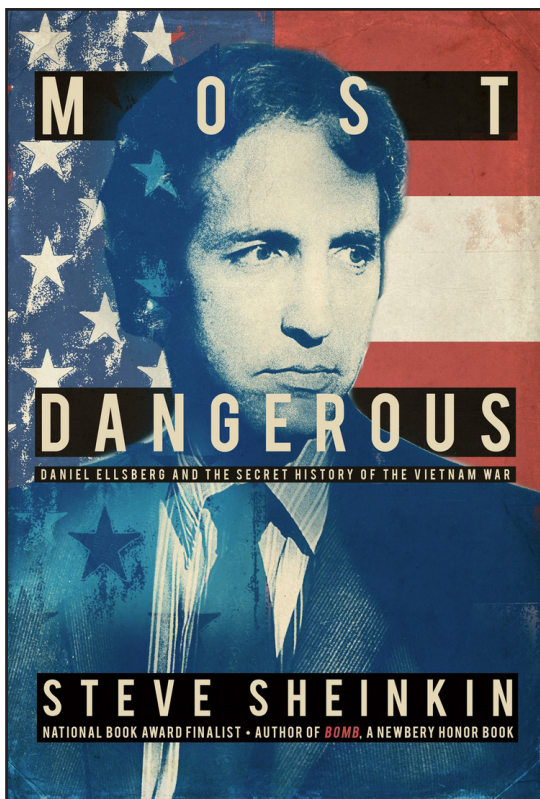
A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

MOST DANGEROUS

Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War

by Steve Sheinkin

FOR USE WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS



Ages 10–14

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About the Book:

From Steve Sheinkin, the award-winning author of *The Port Chicago 50* and *Bomb*, comes a tense, exciting exploration of what the *Times* deemed “the greatest story of the century”: how Daniel Ellsberg transformed from obscure government analyst into “the most dangerous man in America,” and risked everything to expose the government’s deceit. On June 13, 1971, the front page of the *New York Times* announced the existence of a 7,000-page collection of documents containing a secret history of the Vietnam War. Known as The Pentagon Papers, these documents had been commissioned by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Chronicling every action the government had taken in the Vietnam War, they revealed a pattern of deception spanning over twenty years and four presidencies, and forever changed the relationship between American citizens and the politicians claiming to represent their interests. A provocative book that interrogates the meanings of patriotism, freedom, and integrity, *Most Dangerous* further establishes Steve Sheinkin as a leader in children’s nonfiction.

About the Author:



Steve Sheinkin is the award-winning author of several fascinating books on American history, including *The Notorious Benedict Arnold*, which won the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults and the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award for nonfiction. His recent book *Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon* was a Newbery Honor Book, National Book Award finalist, and winner of the Sibert Award as well as the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults. He lives in Saratoga Springs, NY.

To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!

Pre-Reading Activities

Who's Who in Politics

The United States government is comprised of people who work to make this country's political system run smoothly. Sheinkin dives deep into this system. Have your students do the same by exploring these different jobs within the government and the process of making major, critical decisions, such as declaring war. Assign each student a general governmental job or a specific one from *Most Dangerous* for which they will research and then write up that person's daily agenda. Students may include meetings, conference calls, meals, and any other activity they think that person would be doing in a typical day on the job. Students may also include other people that person would be meeting, calling, and dining with. Have them include the reason the meeting is taking place. Do any of the roles overlap? How?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.3

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

Containment and the Domino Theory

The Vietnam War can be considered a "hot war" in the midst of the Cold War. The Cold War, which started immediately after the end of World War II, was a war of ideologies: communism versus democratic capitalism. The United States, being a democratic capitalistic nation, wanted to stop the spread of communism throughout Vietnam. In order for the U.S. to achieve this goal during the Cold War, it supported the fighting of the Vietnam War on the basis of two major ideas: containment and the Domino Theory. Understanding the basic principles of these ideas will help students better understand the outbreak and the long-term fighting of the Vietnam War. Explore these two ideas through the following visual demonstrations.

Demonstrations

◆ **Containment:** Pour water dyed red with food coloring (the red to represent communism) into a plastic container. Do not put on the lid. Ask students what will happen if you turn the container upside down without a lid. They will reply that the water will spill out of the container. Now place the lid on the container and ask the students the same question. The students will reply that the water won't go anywhere and will stay inside the container. This illustrates the U.S. Cold War policy of containment. Like the water, the U.S. wanted to keep communism from spilling out and spreading to other countries.

◆ **Domino Theory:** Without containment, the U.S. government feared the effects of what they called the Domino Theory. Line up dominoes on a desk/table in the front of the classroom. Be creative with how you line them up and the number of dominoes used. Ask the students what happens when you push down the first domino. They will reply that they will all fall down, one at a time. Explain to the students that without containment, the U.S. feared that one by one countries would fall to communism just as the dominoes had.

Further Pre-Reading Discussion & Activities

- Explore other U.S. actions, such as the Marshall Plan, where the U.S. government gave money to other countries to help them resist the temptations of communism and alignment with the Soviet Union.
- As a class, analyze political cartoons to help students understand these policies.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/marshall/images/bearwtext.jpg>

<http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/imagenewdownload.php?accessNumber=M965.199.6608&Lang=1&imageID=206035&format=large>

http://images.flatworldknowledge.com/trowbridge2_1.0/trowbridge2_1.0-fig09_004.jpg

Have students then create political cartoons of their own to illustrate the ideas of containment and the Domino Theory. Include a title, symbols (i.e., hammer and sickle, the bear vs. the bald eagle), captions, significant people and places, and speech bubbles in their cartoons.

- Discuss how the U.S.' fear of the spread of communism is tied to the U.S.' involvement in the Vietnam War that Sheinkin so vividly describes in his book.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of the Vietnam War from the perspective of North Vietnam? South Vietnam? The United States (36–37)? Why and how do they differ? What two American perspectives do you see starting to develop over U.S. involvement in Vietnam?
2. What was the July 28 press conference going to announce? What was it about the president's announcement that day that surprised his staff? Why would the president purposely mislead the public about Vietnam (69)?
3. How is it ironic that the Americans were trying to help the South Vietnamese (87–90)?
4. By the end of Part I, Ellsberg has done and seen a lot related to Vietnam. Discuss his journey thus far. How does he relate his childhood accident to his experience in Vietnam?
5. The president never officially declares war, yet the U.S. government feels it is time to start bombing North Vietnam (43–45) and later feels it is necessary to send ground troops (49). The request for troops increases throughout the war. What is the purpose of requesting more troops to be sent to Vietnam? Why does the president wrestle with the decision to send more troops? Does the president and the U.S. government have the right to make these requests without officially declaring war?
6. Do you think media coverage of war impacts people's views? Why or why not? What role did the media play in uncovering the government's lies in the Vietnam War (130)?
7. What was the purpose of the Pentagon Papers? Why were they such a secret (124–125)? Ellsberg's plan with the Pentagon Papers was moving along rather slowly—making copies, typing, waiting—and so many people were involved in the process. How would the copying and the release of the Pentagon Papers differ in today's world of technology?
8. Define “turning point.” How was the Tet Offensive a turning point for the war? Shortly after this point in the war Ellsberg comes across President Johnson's top secret request for even more troops to be sent to Vietnam. He believes that the people have the right to know. How does this event mark the turning point in his life (132–133)?
9. “I was about to become a dangerous person” (163). How had Ellsberg changed? What did he mean by this? What realization led him to make this bold statement (163)?

10. What were the American people and government more concerned with, the fact the Pentagon Papers were exposed or who was responsible for the leak? How was Ellsberg's strategy of spreading the Pentagon Papers working (240)? Was the publishing of the Papers in so many newspapers spinning out of control or all part of the plan (245–246)? Ellsberg is taking great risks to complete this task. Would you consider Ellsberg to be a traitor or a hero? Why?
11. Who were the Plumbers? What were they trying to find (258–261)? What extreme measures did they take to “get” Ellsberg? What became their new focus (274–275, 278–279)? Was this operation a failure? Explain. How does the evidence of the break in of the psychiatrist's office help Ellsberg's case (305)?
12. What was the Watergate operation? What was the purpose of the cover up plan (281–287)? How did the Watergate scandal help bring an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam (313–314)?
13. What was the historical significance of Nixon's resignation? Why did he decide to resign? Do you think he made the right decision? Why or why not?
14. Is it acceptable to lie if the intention is to protect someone? Do the American people have the right to know about every decision made by the government? Should the American people be lied to? Why or why not?

CCSS:RI.6.2.

Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Vocabulary

Historical/Political Terms & Events

containment (8), flak (25), Tonkin Gulf Resolution (28), Communist (32), Viet Minh (33), Dien Bien Phu (35), Geneva Accords (36), Domino Theory (37), guerrilla (37), Viet Cong (37), “The Johnson Treatment” (41), Great Society (41), Ho Chi Minh Trail (42), electorate (43), inauguration (43), Joint Chiefs (46), Operation Rolling Thunder (47), Students for a Democratic Society (51), platoon (57), Camp David (59), landmines (72), kill ratio (73), Hanoi Hilton (81), draft (85), Agent Orange (87), refugee camps (91), search-and-destroy missions (105), stalemate (122), Pentagon Papers (124), Tet (128), Tet Offensive (129), partisan (136), civil disobedience (171), Vietnamization (178), appealed (237), subpoena (240), indicted (246), impeach (311)

Geography and Places

Plain of Reeds (87), Mekong Delta (100), paddy (103), levee (107), dikes (110), Indochinese (195)

General Academic Vocabulary

embassy (39), interrogated (40), dysentery (41), attrition (85), squalid (91), mortared (101), machetes (111), artillery (111), reconnaissance (111), discrepancy (125), ethos (133), justified (152), solemnity (161), injunction (228), cantankerous (236), obstinate (236), ubiquitous (236), mausoleum (247), dereliction (250), stenographer (250), apoplectic (255), surreptitious (259), preposterous (285), melancholy (292)

Activities

Analyzing Primary Sources

From memos and speeches to photographs and newspaper articles, *Most Dangerous* uses many primary sources to tell the story of Daniel Ellsberg and the Vietnam War. Interacting with these sources

helps students develop a deeper understanding of the historical events that take place in Sheinkin's book. Using the cable from the USS Maddox (19) and the speech by Lyndon Johnson (below) addressing the nation regarding the events that took place in the Gulf of Tonkin, have students analyze the key event that arguably started the war and how the president responded. What lines in each text stand out as critical? Why? What story does each text tell? When the texts are read together, how do their stories change? What emotions do the texts evoke in the reader? Why?

http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/historicspeeches/johnson_lyndon/gulfoftonkin.html

War Songs

The Vietnam War became a topic of interest in many different genres of music allowing artists to express their opinions and feelings about the war to their listeners. Some songs sent out very powerful messages of anti-war beliefs, while others retold stories of brave soldiers fighting in Vietnam. As a whole class or in small groups, read the lyrics to several songs. Have students underline key phrases and words that contribute to the artists' main ideas. Students can then predict what they think the tone of the song will be based on the lyrics (i.e., upbeat, somber, angry). After the students listen to each song, discuss: Were your predictions correct? Was the style of music effective at conveying the song's message? Why or why not? Why do you think music was so important to the war? Are there singers or bands today that use music to make statements about important issues in society? Encourage students to bring in examples and repeat the above activity.

<http://www.magamerica.org/blog/7-vietnam-war-songs-you-need-hear>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

There are countless photographs that were taken during the Vietnam War by soldiers and the press. Use images of the war to create a photo gallery by either producing a digital slideshow or printing and enlarging the photos to display around the classroom. Have students view the slideshow/walk around the room to get a closer look at the images of war. Students should take notes about each photo using the following prompts: observations (What do I see in this photo?), inferences (What do I think is happening in this photo?), emotions (What emotions does this photo evoke?). As a follow-up activity, discuss how these photographs connect back to some of Sheinkin's themes. How do the media of photography and writing compare in how they convey their messages?

Teacher Resources

<http://www.history.com/photos/vietnam-war#>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Oral & Written History

Hearing the stories of actual veterans compels the listener and brings the events from the past to life for students. Since the Vietnam War can be considered relatively recent history, many veterans are still alive to tell their tales. Have students listen to some of the stories from NPR's StoryCorps. As an additional activity, students can interview someone who also lived through the time of the Vietnam War. Interview subjects don't necessarily need to be soldiers. Encourage students to talk to their family members who may have served in Vietnam, lost a friend or family member to the war, participated in anti-war protests, or watched the news coverage of the war and the story of Daniel Ellsberg. Have the students, based on their knowledge of the war and their reading of *Most Dangerous*, write a series of questions and conduct an interview. Students can record the interview and play it back to the class. Students may even invite the person they are interviewing into class to tell their story.

Teacher Resources

<http://storycorps.org/?s=Vietnam+War&term=story>

In addition to listening to veterans' stories, students may also read soldiers' letters written about the war. By analyzing various perspectives, students can see first hand how soldiers felt about the war at the time. Using the following questions as a guide, open the class up for a reflective discussion: What different perspectives did you see as you read? What were the different attitudes toward the war? Does one's experiences bias or affect one's perspectives? How?

Teacher Resources

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/726659.stm

<http://vietvet.org/letters.htm>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Online Resources

Article about the lasting impacts of landmines

<http://www.pbs.org/vietnampassage/perspectives/perspectives.landmines.html>

Article looking back at Vietnam and the lessons learned

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2005/04/29/1444/vietnam-war-30-years-later/>

Timeline of events of the Vietnam War

<http://www.datesandevents.org/events-timelines/06-vietnam-war-timeline.htm>

The Hanoi Hilton

<http://www.wjla.com/articles/2012/05/hanoi-hilton-prisoners-of-war-share-survival-stories--75778.html>

<http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=23857689>

<http://havecamerawilltravel.com/hao-prison-hanoi-hilton-vietnam>

The Patriot Act

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-107hr3162enr/pdf/BILLS-107hr3162enr.pdf>

The Role of Media in the Vietnam War

<http://ows.edb.utexas.edu/site/reimagining-vietnam-war/media-coverage-vietnam-war>

About the Teacher's Guide Creators:

This educator's guide was written by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former high school English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 Educational Consulting (www.rm228.com), with high school social studies teacher Cortney Silberman.



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