

**Interview with Joseph Jelen  
Montgomery County History Teacher  
Vietnam War Cartoon**

**1. Lesson Introduction (1:05)**

The class that I was teaching was an AP level class made up of ninth- through twelfth-graders, and certainly a majority of whom are ninth-graders.

At this point we are in the 1960s looking at—we've looked at foreign policy through the 50s into the 60s. This was the first day of looking at the Vietnam War.

I was hoping that students would see the complexity of the Vietnam War and see the complexity of the American public's reaction to the Vietnam war. I was hoping that they would gain some insight of how people were reacting to what they were seeing on television and opening up and seeing in *Life* Magazine, beginning to get a feel of people unsure of whether this war was a good idea.

**2. Opening Up the Textbook (3:44)**

The lesson is based on opening up the textbook, and that would mean that students are being asked to challenge, or to look more specifically at the textbook and regard it not as the be-all/end-all of history, but regard it as something that can be argued with.

[Classroom interaction visual]

So the first step in the opening up the textbook lesson was to examine: What does their textbook say about this incident? So students were given a selection from their textbook about the event, and students were asked to think about and write down what sources they felt perhaps were left out of the textbook, whose voices they would like to hear in addition to what the textbook authors showed in their account.

[Classroom interaction visual]

Eventually they were led to think about, well, the American public. What was the American public thinking during— as these events came to light?

In addition, students were asked to think about: well, who was the author of the textbook? And one student was given an actual textbook to identify: “Were these historians? Were they hired by Prentice Hall?” So students were asked to do some sourcing and think about the validity of the source.

### **3. Analyzing Primary Sources (1:52)**

[Classroom interaction visual]

And students on a capture sheet were asked to identify some conclusions that they could draw from each of those four voices.

[Classroom interaction visual]

I approached some groups who began to question what was being said and began to question the why Lieutenant Calley was saying what he was saying, that “he tries to make it seem like he’s some sort of hero.” And I think that that’s an important aspect of this and that Lieutenant Calley did feel like he hadn’t really done anything wrong in following his orders. So eliciting that from students was encouraging.

### **4. Zoom-In Inquiry (1:53)**

We quickly moved, then, into continuing to examine the American public’s reaction by looking at Paul Conrad’s political cartoon. Students participated in what’s called a “zoom-in inquiry,” looking at a cartoon in small pieces, looking at a specific part of the cartoon and not the entire image, and revealing slowly the entire image to them, thereby eliciting responses about more specific pieces of the cartoon to engage in some hypothesis making and think about what’s coming next.

[Classroom visual interaction]

### **5. Zoom-In Inquiry cont. (2:37)**

[Classroom interaction visual]

Slowing down the process of looking at the cartoon really helped students examine more closely details that you as a teacher want to pick out and have them examine.

### **6. Rewriting the Textbook (1:28)**

What students were ultimately being asked to do was to think that their textbook is a living, breathing document that they have some ability to edit and to challenge in some ways, that the textbook isn’t the be-all/end-all of history, and that they can have some say through their own historical analysis where the truth might lie, or in our case, what voices might have been left out

[Classroom interaction visual]

They frequently wanted to add more of what Lieutenant Calley had said in his testimony. They were interested in looking at what the Vietnamese people saw that day. They felt that the textbook left out the voice of the villagers as to what they had witnessed. And by the end of the lesson, they are including information about the American public and the American public’s reaction to the events that had occurred at My Lai and the trial of Lieutenant Calley that followed.

## **7. Using Primary Sources (1:35)**

I think that, as with so many lessons, one of the biggest problems and stumbling blocks is trying to do too much in too short of a time. In this case I felt that the—looking at the primary sources was a little rushed. I would have like to have spent more time looking and hearing from students their responses, the conclusions that they had been drawing. I think that if I were to go back and change anything, perhaps I would use fewer sources, allowing some time to really delve into the voices that we were hearing and the primary sources we were examining.

They understand the importance of primary sources as to being able to construct some meaning from the people who were there, or the people who took photographs of events. Students like to hear those voices and like to see those photos and hear those diary entries, or whatever it might be, and primary sources have a way of making history for students a little less tidy than they would like, and I think that's good. That's challenging what they are thinking about and what they believe to be true. The focus on historical thinking skills is certainly helped build, build better understanding of history and made them more critical thinkers about the world around them I think.

## **8. Teaching American History (0:55)**

As for the Teaching American History grant, it's been useful in —giving me some approaches to use with students that I hadn't used before, structured activities. The website has a number of examples, and has templates. It doesn't necessarily have to be the sources that TAH has used, but plugging in your own sources into the templates has been useful to me in teaching some of American History. I think also, it's made me a better researcher. I think that through our participation at the National Archives and through making our lesson plans we were asked to do a little bit more research than we had in the past as teachers.