



## Lesson Plan: Historical Perspectives: Coming Home from War

### THE FILM

This lesson plan utilizes the film and website resources for **The Way We Get By**, which tells the story of a group of volunteers who have greeted more than 900,000 troops at a tiny airport in Bangor, Maine. Classrooms can use these resources to conduct an investigation that compares and contrasts the homecoming experiences of soldiers who served in World War II and the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network:

[www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/).

Please visit our Film Library at [http://www.amdoc.org/outreach\\_filmlibrary.php](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php) to find other films suitable for classroom use.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret film clips.
- Work in groups to research the homecoming experiences of soldiers who served in World War II and in the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Identify political and social factors that may have influenced how troops were and are welcomed home from each conflict.
- Discuss research findings in groups.
- Organize their research findings and analysis in compare/contrast essays.

### GRADE LEVELS

6-12

### SUBJECT AREAS

Civics, U.S. History, Current Events, Language Arts

### MATERIALS

- Method of showing the entire class online video clips and allowing student groups to conduct research on the Web
- Handout: [Soldiers Coming Home](#) (PDF)
- The book [Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned From Vietnam](#) by Bob Greene (optional)

### ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period, plus time outside of class to research and write student essays.

### SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: [“Welcome Home”](#) (length 0:58)

The clip starts at 3:22 as Bill walks on a crosswalk and ends at 4:20 when a female soldier and a troop greeter hug.

Clip 2: "Soldiers Respond to the Troop Greeters" (length 2:43)

The clip begins at 15:56 when the soldier says, "I think you sort of prepare yourself to be numb..." and ends at 18:39 when the soldier says, "...my children will know who those two men were."

## **BACKGROUND**

The group featured in the film, the Maine Troop Greeters, is comprised of volunteers who come together to welcome the return of or bid farewell to American military service members at Bangor International Airport (BIA). The airport is the first major American airport for airplanes approaching the United States from the east, as well as the last major airport for airliners going toward Europe. Its location, uncluttered airspace and long runway make it a favorite stop for military planes. The Maine Troop Greeters' efforts began in 1991, when members began to greet troops traveling to serve in the first Persian Gulf War. Over the last six years, the group has greeted more than 5,000 flights, carrying more than 900,000 service members. In addition to hugs and handshakes, the greeters have provided free cell phones and snacks. Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton have joined the troop greeters at the Bangor airport. There are similar greeting programs around the country in areas such as Dallas, TX; Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; and Pease, NH.

## **ACTIVITY**

1. Tell students that you are going to show them a video clip of a group of volunteers from the Maine Troop Greeters as they welcome home a flight of soldiers at the airport in Bangor, Maine. Explain that the Maine Troop Greeters show up day and night to provide soldiers with handshakes, hugs, snacks, free cell phone service and messages of thanks. Then, play Clip 1.

2. Next, have the class watch a clip that shows a few of the soldiers who have been welcomed by the Maine Troop Greeters. Ask students to take notes on how the soldiers respond to the greeters and what the soldiers seem to be feeling as they return home. Then, play Clip 2.

3. Divide the class into groups of three and ask each group to research, compare and contrast the homecoming experiences of soldiers in the video with troops who fought in World War II and the Vietnam War. Ask students to take notes on the provided handout as they collect information. The POV website features a photo gallery of Maine Troop Greeters and a collection of stories from soldiers and family members who have benefited from their hospitality. Some Vietnam veterans have also submitted their experiences to POV's Regarding War website. Vietnam War veteran Bill Hunt shares his point of view online ([http://www.deanza.edu/faculty/swensson/interview\\_hunt\\_cominghome.html](http://www.deanza.edu/faculty/swensson/interview_hunt_cominghome.html)). Students can also read letters from Vietnam veterans who described their homecoming experiences to *Chicago Tribune* staffer Bob Greene in the book, Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned From Vietnam. Students can make observations and inferences about the return of soldiers after World War II by watching a video slideshow (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8qolkZDE5I>) or by watching newsreel footage of the end of the war. (Go to <http://video.google.com> and search for "VE Day VJ Day End of WWII Celebrations 1945 Newsreel and Stock Footage.") While these resources also

provide insights about political and social factors that may have influenced how troops were welcomed home from the two conflicts, students should feel free to consult their textbooks and the websites in the Resources section for more information, or to conduct additional research on their own.

4. Ask student groups to discuss their research findings and analyze what these homecoming experiences for soldiers reveal about the politics and culture of the United States during the time period of each war.

5. Conclude the activity by asking students to write compare/contrast essays.

### **ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Students can be assessed on:

- Contributions to group work.
- Details noted on their handouts.
- The quality of information and analysis in their compare/contrast essays.

### **EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS**

- Plan and carry out a class service project for active-duty soldiers. The POV website provides [Tips from Soldiers and Others on Best Ways to Support the Troops](#). The site also features a [map](#) of volunteer opportunities available around the country. Classes can also work with one of the organizations in this [online directory](#) (<http://www.military.com/benefits/resources/support-our-troops>) that serves troops and their families.
- Help soldiers readjust successfully to civilian life. Tell the class that after soldiers return home, they face a number of challenges and continue to need support. Ask small student groups to read posts from the POV feature [Coming Home: Veterans Readjusting to Civilian Life](#). Ask each group to examine its assigned article, identify the specific challenges that veterans experience and discuss how families, friends and communities can help. Make a T-chart on the board with the headings “Challenges of Veterans” and “Ways to Help.” Ask each group to summarize these points from its article and add this information to the class chart. Then, tell the class develop and carry out an action plan, either by sharing this information online (through Twitter, Facebook, email, select blogs, etc.) or by volunteering to help in one of the ways suggested in the articles.
- Watch **The Way We Get By** in its entirety and take notes on the ways that both the troop greeters and the troops benefit from their interactions. Do these principles apply to other types of volunteer opportunities? Ask students to draw from personal experiences or interview people who have done volunteer work and write about what volunteers gain from the experience. Students can then share the results of their investigations with the rest of the class.
- Study the history and significance of Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Ask students to write news stories about the ways their communities honor veterans on those days and throughout the year, such as with parades, with memorials, by placing flags or wreaths at cemeteries or by providing specific community services for veterans. Illustrate these stories with images, video clips or artwork. Then, organize these materials in a blog, in a community wiki honoring veterans, as a slideshow set to music or as an exhibit.

- Invite veterans from your community to speak to the class about their experiences returning home at the end of a war or after a deployment. How were they received by loved ones and the community? What challenges have they faced? What additional support would be helpful? Prepare for their visit by asking students to develop questions for the veterans and submit them to you. Then, select the questions that best address your curriculum objectives and provide them to the guest speakers in advance to help focus their remarks. Teachers can also pose the questions to the guests during class; use an interview format so you can better control time and the topics addressed. Finally, remember to tell students to send thank you notes to the veterans after their visit.
- Consider different perspectives on what it means to “support the troops.” In the film, a Maine Troop Greeter named Jerry says, “We support their [the troops] dedication to the country. We don’t necessarily support the reason they got sent there. We support them.” Compare and contrast Jerry’s position with that of Robert Jensen in the article “Support the Troops” (<http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0407-08.htm>), in which Jensen argues that supporting the troops is the same thing as supporting the war – they can’t be separated. With whom do students agree? Why? Ask students to organize their thinking into persuasive essays.

## **RESOURCES**

### **How to Write a Compare/Contrast Essay**

<http://www.bookrags.com/articles/5.html>

This article provides a quick summary of how to write this type of essay.

### **World War II Materials**

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/WW2/WW2bib.html#American>

The Library of Congress has compiled a host of resources from its own collection and the collections of other organizations.

### **Veterans History Project**

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/>

This resource from the Library of Congress archives the personal accounts of war veterans involved in conflicts since World War I.

### **The Vietnam War**

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/vietnam/index.cfm>

The Digital History website, a project of the University of Houston, contains extensive information about the Vietnam War era.

## **STANDARDS**

These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

### **Behavioral Studies**

**Standard 1:** Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

## **Civics**

Standard 10: Understands the role of volunteerism and organized groups in American social and political life.

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity.

## **Language Arts**

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

## **U.S. History**

Standard 25: Understands the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Standard 27: Understands how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics.

Standard 30: Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics from the Nixon to the Clinton presidencies.

Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.

### **Background Sources**

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