Use this guide to explore exhibition highlights and a variety of perspectives of the war.

Note: this family guide is recommended for visitors ages 12 and up. This exhibition contains graphic, violent content.

1945–1975
VIETNAM WAR

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM & LIBRARY
MAKING HISTORY MATTER

Look closely at this work of art.

What colors, textures, materials, and images do you notice?

Vietnam is a place, not just a war. How does artist Dinh Thi Tham Poong portray her country here?

Why Vietnam? 1945-65

How and why did the U.S. decide to fight a war in Vietnam?

- Draw lines to match U.S. involvements in Vietnam to the U.S. president (or presidents) who led them.
  - Truman
    - Promoting the partition of North and South Vietnam
  - Eisenhower
    - Financing the French Indochina War
  - Kennedy
    - Sending ground troops to Vietnam
  - Johnson
    - Sending Green Berets to train South Vietnamese troops

What do dominoes have to do with why the U.S. got involved in Vietnam?

Find Ho Chi Minh in each of these images.
- How is he depicted differently in them?
- Who was the intended audience for each image?

WHERE WAS THIS WAR?

The Vietnam War was mainly fought in South Vietnam. The war also reached Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam.
What happened to the USS Maddox? Find the model of the ship and read about the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

In the Deployment section, find the bunks soldiers slept in as they shipped off for war. What do the words and drawings on the bunks tell you about soldiers’ mindsets at the time?

 Perspectives

Visit the What was on their minds? section and read the words of volunteer Charles Gentry and resister General Baker Jr.

Discuss with your family: what shaped their views on whether or not to serve in the military? When there is a draft, should people have to serve if they disagree with a war?

Learn about volunteers, draftees, deferred people, resisters, and conscientious objectors.

 Who Fought This War?

☆ South Vietnamese insurgents known as Viet Cong (VC)
☆ North Vietnamese Army (NVA)
☆ Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)
☆ United States
☆ Small numbers of international forces
War on Many Fronts: 1966-67

What was happening on the U.S. home front and in Vietnam in the first few years of the war?

Explore the War Front Mural showing the four combat tactical zones of the war in Vietnam. Learn about these highlights from each zone using the guide brochure or touchscreens nearby:

Con Thien    Dak To    Tunnels    Game Warden

Discuss with your family: what surprises you about how this war was fought?

Explore the War Front Case and find...

- Something worn or carried
- A letter sent home
- Propaganda made for soldiers on both sides of the conflict

Try to lift the U.S. infantry rucksack.

How long do you think you could carry this in the heat, through jungles, or in water before needing a rest?
Read the excerpt of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Beyond Vietnam” speech. Compare his message to this poster: 🤔 Discuss with your family: How might Dr. King have reacted to this poster?

Now explore the Home Front Mural. Read the signs held by demonstrators at the two marches. How did marchers’ viewpoints differ on the war?

Choose a march to join. What would your sign say?
Write or draw it here:

Flip through some popular albums from the wartime era.
Which seem to be about the war?
Discuss with your family: what are your favorite songs about current (or past) events in history?
Turning Point: 1968

Why was 1968 such a turbulent year in the U.S. and a turning point in the war?

Breaking news! Learn about the Tet Offensive. Then grab an imaginary mic and pretend you are TV anchorman Walter Cronkite, who covered the attacks from South Vietnam. Tell your family what American viewers need to know about the war.

Explore the 1968 timeline.

WARNING: This timeline contains images of graphic violence.

Share your voice like it’s 1968! Design a button that shows your views on something mentioned in the timeline, such as a protest, a politician, or policy.
Discuss with your family: What would you do as President Johnson in these situations?

- After the Tet Offensive, General Westmoreland asked Johnson for 200,000 more troops. Would you say yes or no?
- Johnson decided not to run for reelection in 1968. Would you have done the same? Why or why not?

Learn about the 1968 U.S. presidential candidates and hold a family election. Ask each person to advocate for a candidate, then tally votes below. Check out the actual election results in the **voting booth**.
Searching for an Exit: 1969-1973

What were the final years of the war like on the war and home fronts?

How did Life magazine choose to report on the American death toll in June, 1969?
Look at the photo spread in Winning America’s Peace.

In the photographs near the text labeled Troop Withdrawals & Vietnamization, what flags are being taken down and raised? What does that tell you about the meaning of “Vietnamization”?

Find a bomblet like those dropped on Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos during the Air War.

True or false: The U.S. dropped more tons of bombs during the Vietnam War than in World War II.

See real footage of bombing in the middle of the room.

Who were the “silent majority” and what were their views?

Read the Supporters text and look at the political buttons they wore. Why did they support Nixon and the war?
Read about the outcomes of the Paris Peace Accords, then write thought bubbles for the treaty’s main negotiators Le Duc Tho (left, North Vietnam) and Henry Kissinger (right, U.S.).

What might they have been thinking as this photo was taken?

Watch the videos about veterans Fred Smith and Frankie Gaye (brother of singer Marvin Gaye).

What challenges and opportunities did veterans face at home?

The War Up Close: The Press section shows how the American press covered difficult aspects of the war, including The Pentagon Papers, the My Lai Massacre, and the effects of napalm bombing on children.

WARNING: This area contains images of graphic violence and death.
Aftermath: 1973 and Beyond

How did, and does, this war continue to affect people after it ended?

Who was Le Anh Hao?
Discuss with your family: how does war affect civilians who live on a war front?

Perspectives

We want to hear your perspective. Leave your thoughts in the comment book or in the phone booth down the hall in response to one of the questions on the wall.

Join us for these special family programs.

All programs free with Museum admission.
Email familyprograms@nyhistory.org for more information.

Reading into History Family Book Club Meetings

Recommended for ages 9-12
November 12, 2 pm: Featuring Thanhha Lai’s Inside Out & Back Again. Meet the author!
January 14, 2 pm: Featuring Russell Freedman’s Vietnam: A History of the War

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend

Breaking Silence: Dr. King and the "Beyond Vietnam" Speech
January 13, 2 pm: Hear excerpts from Dr. King’s groundbreaking speech, “Beyond Vietnam”, and meet speech organizer Reverend Richard Fernandez
Recommended for ages 9+, advance reservations recommended

Special Vietnam War Storytime
January 15, 2 pm: Listen to Walter Dean Myers’ children’s book, Patrol, about a black Vietnam soldier. Recommended for ages 8+
Explore the timeline about the aftermath of the war including the following elements:

- Read about the Fall of Saigon in 1975. Discuss your thoughts on this outcome of the war with your family.
- Find two rings and accompanying letters that were left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. What did these rings mean to the people who left them at The Wall?
- What is UXO? How do they affect the lives of people in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos today? What do you think should be done about this issue?

The Kid Who Helped Leak the Pentagon Papers: Robert Ellsberg and Steve Sheinkin in Conversation

February 3, 2pm: Acclaimed children's author Steven Sheinkin (Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War) will talk with Robert Ellsberg, who at 13 helped his father Daniel Ellsberg leak the Pentagon Papers. Using footage from the documentary The Most Dangerous Man in America, Sheinkin and Ellsberg will help families understand one of the biggest scandals of the 20th century, and a kid’s role in it! Q&A and book signing to follow. Recommended for ages 9+, advance reservations recommended

Land Mine Awareness Featuring Legacies of War

April 8, 2 pm: Join Legacies of War for a presentation and discussion on unexploded land mines from Vietnam War-era bombing and how they continue to impact people on the former war fronts. Recommended for ages 10+

Check out our online family programs calendar at nyhistory.org/familycalendar for more events!

Explore U.S. soldier and veteran experiences, and participate in Vietnamese culinary and story time programs.
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