**Aim:**

**Topic: Vietnam War at home**

**Task: Read the events of Vietnam affecting America at home and answer the questions that follow.**

**Event #1 – Draft Riot and Counter Culture**

Vietnam may have been America’s most controversial war. In order to meet the demand for the millions of soldiers that would be needed, the U.S. government reinstituted the **draft –** selecting people to the army by lottery. **Drafting** people right out of high school to fight a war that many were not sure of why we were fighting (and politicians did not make it clear) angered many people. The media had very negative coverage of the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre, and not only made it look like America was losing, but that all U.S. soldiers were “baby-killers.” People across the nation began openly questioning the war and wanting the government to end it. Students across the country protested both the war and the conformity of their parents’ generation. Opposition to the Vietnam War created many movements and protests: many different movements formed: student protests across campuses, the hippie movement (which was a **counter culture** to the conformity of the ‘50’s), and even a Veterans of Vietnam Against the War (VVAW) protest movement. The Vietnam War affected everything from society, culture to politics. To protest the draft, people would gather publicly and burn their draft card notices (which was also a Federal Crime). In one instance, 500,000 people gathered together in Central Park to burn their draft notices and protest the war.

**Event #2 – Counter-culture:** - Protests to the war in Vietnam helped to drive the American (mostly youth) counter-culture movement. The Vietnam War helped to exacerbate (make worse) tensions between the parent and young adult generations who were rebelling against the conformity of the 1950’s. Other tensions included: race relations, women’s rights, authority, and lifestyle (including promiscuous sexuality, the hippie movement, experimental drugs, anti-conformity and even music). People would hitch hike across the country and make friends with other young people, live together, and question adult authority New pop and rock music (which often was based in protest songs) emerged as well. This young counter culture took the lead in all of the Vietnam protests. Artists, musicians, and literature addressed political and social issues of the 1960’s U.S. Many music lyrics were about the tensions of Vietnam War. The content of rock songs turned toward rebellion, social protest, sex, and increasingly, drugs. Many famous musicians, such as the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, played at the **Woodstock Festival**. Beginning in 1969, Woodstock was a 3 day music festival in the Catskills that supported the idea of PEACE and MUSIC.

**Event #3 – Effects on President Johnson and the Democratic Party 1968**

President Johnson’s Great Society Program required millions of dollars in government spending. However, so, too, did the Vietnam War. Johnson took away funding from the Great Society to fund the Vietnam War as early as 1966. However, the Vietnam War was costing two billion dollars per month. Martin Luther King Jr. even stated that *“Promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefield of Vietnam...it is estimated that we (the U.S.) spend $322,000 for each enemy we (the U.S.) kill, while we (the U.S.) spend in the so-called War on Poverty in American only about $53 each person classified as ‘poor’...it challenges the imagination to contemplate (consider) what lives we could transform if we were to cease (stop) killing*. Johnson began receiving criticism from both Republicans (because of the massive spending of the Great Society) and Democrats (because of his hawkish (pro-war) Vietnam stance). Due to the mounting protests against the war by American citizens, growing criticism against President Johnson, and growing support of anti-war politicians, President Johnson announced that he was not running for President. Since President Johnson was not running for re-election, the Democrats had to find another candidate. In 1968, Presidential hopeful (and anti-war) Robert Kennedy was assassinated, and the Democrats chose pro-war Herbert Humphreys (Johnson’s vice president) instead. At the Democratic National Convention (where representatives of the Democratic Party gather to nominate the candidate) in Chicago, Illinois people rioted outside of the convention and clashed with the Illinois National Guard. This was known as the Democratic Convention Riots of 1968.

**Event #4 – Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW)**

Veterans became very discouraged by the war for many reasons; America’s unwillingness to fight to its fullest, feeling betrayed when coming home to angry citizens, and witnessing some of the atrocities committed in Vietnam. Many veterans came back home and spoke out against the war and demanded that America bring the soldiers home (John Kerry who became a Senator, Presidential Candidate in 2004 and Secretary of State in 2014). At the **Winter Soldier Meetings**, former veterans threw their medals into water and spoke about crimes they saw and committed overseas.

**Event #5 – Student Reaction – Kent State and Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent School District.**

The draft caused great anger among students and protests were held across hundreds of American campuses. Places such as Columbia, Berkeley College and even Brooklyn College were shut down with protests; students and professors arrested alike. However, the worst protest came at Kent State University (Ohio) in May, 1970. When students tried to take over the campus with protests, the Ohio National Guard was called out and fired into the crowd. This resulted in 9 students injured and 4 dead.

High school students as well as college students tried to protest the Vietnam War. Several students in a Des Moines high schools and junior high schools wore black arm bands and peace symbols to protest the war. The school district found out what they were doing and suspended them. The students sued, with the case eventually going up to the Supreme Court. In the case of ***Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District,*** The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment applies inside of schools and that students cannot be suspended if they are peacefully stating an unpopular/controversial view.

**Event #6 – Combination with the Civil Rights Movement**

Protest against the war combined with the Civil Rights movement (the movement to create social, political and economic equality for African Americans which started in the 1940’s and 1950’s) as early statistics showed that blacks were dying at higher proportions than whites (although they served and were drafted very proportionately). Before his assassination, Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders began speaking out against the war. After his death, Civil Rights activists joined the anti-war movement to bring an end to the war. However, as the Vietnam War took away from the Great Society Program, it also distracted the nation from the Civil Rights movement and may have slowed its growing successes.

1. **Should people have reacted as they did? Why/why not? Whose reactions do you agree with? Whose reactions do you disagree with?**

**2) Did the Vietnam War impact American society more positively or negatively? Why?**

1. **Why do you think the Vietnam War had such a great impact on so many different parts of American society, politics and economics?**