**Aim:**

**Topic:** America’s involvement in Vietnam and start of the Vietnam War (1954-1965)

**Introduction – Background to Vietnam**

Vietnam is a country in Indo-China (South East Asia). Since the 19th century, it was controlled by the French, but after World War II, Ho Chi Minh led a Communist revolt against the French. After nine years of bitter fighting, the French were defeated, and signed the **Geneva Accords** which split Vietnam into a Communist North under Ho Chi Minh, and a Democratic South under President Ngo Dinh Diem. After two years, the country was supposed to have a nationwide-election to unite the two countries, however, America knew the Communists would win the election, and did not want to see one United Communist Vietnam. The United States told South Vietnam (who did not want to be Communist) not to honor the Geneva Accords and to remain their own separate country. When no election took place, the North began waging a war against the South.

1. **How did the Geneva Accords affect Vietnam?**
2. **Why did America not want South and North Vietnam to have one election? Do you think America should get involved? Why/why not?**

**Task: Mini in-class Document Based Question**

1) Read the Four Documents below and answer the questions

2) Choose one of the following two questions to answer:

***- Which President should receive the most responsibility for America’s involvement/entanglement in Vietnam? Why?***

***- Do you agree/disagree with America’s decision to go to war against the North Vietnamese and help the South Vietnamese?***

3) Create a one sentence thesis sentence

4) Answer it in two-three paragraphs (5-7 sentences, using at least 4 specifics (which you should identify which document they were a part of) answer:

**I. President #1 - President Eisenhower and the “Domino Theory”**

President Eisenhower created the “Domino Theory” for South East Asia – that if one of the countries there fell, all of them would fall…Eisenhower explains the importance of Indochina…

*“First of all, Indochina produces materials that the world needs, such as tin and rubber. Then you have the possibility of that many human beings would be controlled by a dictatorship that is unfriendly to the free world. Asia, after all, has already lost some 450 million of its peoples to Communist dictatorships, and we simply can’t afford greater losses. Finally, you must consider what you would call the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up; you knock over the first one, and the last one will certainly fall very quickly…As a result, the geographical position Vietnam [threatens] Japan, Formosa, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. So the possible consequences of the loss are just incalculable to the free world.”*

*\*\*\**As a result, Eisenhower refused to allow the full country election in Vietnam take place, let South Vietnam stay independent, and began sending aid and military advisors to help South Vietnam.

**1) According to Eisenhower, why is it important that Vietnam does not fall to the Communists?**

**2)**  **How did Eisenhower lead to America becoming more entangled (involved to a point you cannot escape from)?**

**II. President #2 - President Kennedy**

President Kennedy wanted to make a stand against Communism also believed in the Domino Theory. However, the Vietnamese Communists in the North were supporting **guerilla (rebel)** communists in the South known as the **Vietcong.** These Vietcong were waging war against Diem’s government, and Diem repeatedly kept asking the United States for more money. Kennedy sent millions of dollars as well as 16,000 military and CIA advisors to train the South Vietnamese army and help fight with them. The more money and men Kennedy sent, the more he committed America to Vietnam and the outcome of its civil war. Kennedy liked Diem, but Kennedy’s advisors in Vietnam said that Diem was not doing a good job and becoming too dictatorial (his secret police were arresting hundreds of people, including Buddhist monks who were against him). Kennedy’s advisors organized a coup (takeover) against Diem, and with Kennedy’s permission, South Vietnamese Generals overthrew and assassinated Diem. Kennedy and his advisors thought that the new leader, General Minh, would bring order and democratic reforms, but what followed was several more coups by generals and a very unstable government that would have to be supported by more American money and eventually men.

**1) Why was it a bad decision to order the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem? Why/why not?**

**2) How did Kennedy lead to America becoming more entangled (involved to a point you cannot escape from) in Vietnam?**

**III. President #3 - President Johnson**

Barely two weeks after President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. President Johnson was left with the decision of what to do in Vietnam: should America just leave its commitment or should it stay and help Vietnam fight off the Communists in the North and its own country? South Vietnam’s leadership after the coup was not very good, the strength and military success of the Vietcong was growing. President Johnson needed an excuse to fight the Communists there, or else the South Vietnamese would take over. That opportunity came on August 2 and August 4 1964, when the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy were supposedly attacked by North Vietnamese ships in the **Gulf of Tonkin;** these events were known as **The Gulf of Tonkin Incident.** However, the American ships were not damaged in either incident, and there is evidence that they might not even have been threatened by the North Vietnamese. However, it was the excuse that Johnson needed, and he went to Congress with the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** – asking for permission to send soldiers to Vietnam. Congress approved, and in 1965, America began its 10-year war in Vietnam.

**1) Do you think that Johnson should have asked Congress for permission to go to Vietnam? Why/why not?**

**2) How did Johnson lead to America becoming more entangled (involved to a point you cannot escape from)?**

**Document #4: President Johnson’s reasons for the Vietnam War**

*“Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam…We have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence. And I intend to keep our promise…*

*We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe, from Berlin to Thailand, are people whose well-being resets, in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Vietnam alone would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of American commitment, the value of America’s word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war.*

*Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Vietnam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed (repeated) in one country and then another. The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied.”* - President Lyndon Johnson, 1965

**1) What are two reasons that Johnson gives supporting why America should go to Vietnam?**

**2) Do you agree with him? Why/why not?**