Media portrayal of the Vietnam War Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is to be used as part of a unit studying the Vietnam war. Rather than looking at what happened in the war itself, it analyses how the war has been portrayed by two different sources.

Students will compare and contrast two views of the American experience in Vietnam presented by the comic book The ’Nam and the movie Platoon.

Both came out in 1986, and both were written by Vietnam vets. Although Platoon won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Doug Murray, the writer of The ’Nam, won an award from a veterans’ group for his portrayal of the war in the media, beating out vet Oliver Stone’s Platoon [this information is provided on the student sheets for this assignment as well].

1. Start by handing out the five page student packet. Go through it briefly with the class, and stress that you’ll be starting with the comic book.
2. You will need issues #1, #5 and #9 of Marvel Comic’s “The ’Nam.” The series is available in a number of reprinted editions that aren’t hard to find on the internet.
3. Have students start reading the comics. This will take 1-2 class periods depending on your students. You may wish to split the class, having half read the comic and half watch excerpts from the movie so you don’t need as many copies of the comic.
4. Watch the following segments from the movie Platoon (takes about two class periods):
   A. Beginning to 26:14 (end of first firefight).
      *Before the next clip explain that some of the soldiers committed atrocities in a village, including murder (that’s what the discussion is regarding at the beginning of the next clip).
   B. 58:44 to 1:20:47 (after Elias is killed).
   C. 1:27:00 to end.
5. Use the final class period to have students complete pages 4 and 5 in their packet. Page 4 is a series of Venn Diagrams (students may draw in the ovals on their sheets). The last page of the packet does reference Band of Brothers, so if you haven’t shown any clips from that, you should delete that line from your document.
6. Some students may need considerable guidance in making some of the connections between the movie and the comic book. You may also want to discuss this assignment as a class when finished.
Compare and contrast two views of the American experience in Vietnam presented by the comic book *The 'Nam* and the movie *Platoon*.

Both came out in 1986, and both were written by Vietnam vets. Although *Platoon* won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Doug Murray, the writer of *The 'Nam*, won an award from a veterans’ group for his portrayal of the war in the media, beating out vet Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*.

**PART 1: Read** excerpts from *The 'Nam*.

**PART 2: Watch** excerpts from *Platoon*.

**PART 3: Complete your comparison.**

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**PART 1: THE ‘NAM**

*Issues 1, 5 and 9*

The 'Nam took place in “real time”, meaning that each issue represented approximately one month (the comic came out on a monthly basis). The issues selected span Ed Marks’ experience throughout his tour of duty in Vietnam during the year 1966.

As you read, take notes on the following things:

**Issue #1**

Ed Marks:

First Sergeant (“Top”):

Rob Little:

Mike Albergo:

Sgt. Polkow:
Marks’ first experience in combat:

**Issue #5**

Notes: Rob Little is no longer Top’s secretary—he’s out in the field with Ed’s platoon. Mike Albergo is on leave, so he’s hardly seen in this issue.

Ed Marks:

Rob Little:

Sgt. Polkow:

“Top”:

Specialist Hale:

What the unit finds at the village:

How Ed’s unit gets back to base:

What happens to Top:

**Issue #9**

Why does Mike want to extend his tour in Vietnam?

Why does Ed start screaming in the middle of the night?

How does this story end?
Excerpts from the 1986 Academy Award for Best Picture

Take notes on the following characters to help you keep track of them.

Chris Taylor:

Sgt. Barnes:

Sgt. Elias:

Bunny:

Junior:

Francis:

Sgt. O'Neil:

King:

Rhah:

More notes:
PART 3: COMPARISON

• In what ways are the two stories’ main characters (Ed Marks and Chris Taylor) alike? In what ways are they different? Complete the Venn Diagram below.

Ed Marks  Similarities  Chris Taylor

• Compare the leaders in the two stories (Sgt. Polkow and “Top” in The ‘Nam and Barnes & Elias in Platoon).

Sgt. Polkow  Similarities  Sgt. Elias

Top  Similarities  Barnes
Compare the differences in how problems among the leaders were dealt with in the two stories.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem:</th>
<th>Polkow/Top</th>
<th>Barnes/Elias</th>
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How did they deal with these problems?

- Which story do you think was more realistic in the way it portrayed the Vietnam experience for American soldiers? WHY?

- It’s likely that you’ll find some aspects of each that are more realistic than the other--explain that.

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<tr>
<th>The ’Nam</th>
<th>Platoon</th>
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- Compare what you read/watched about the Vietnam war with what you read & watched about WWII (specifically Band of Brothers). How were the two wars different for the men who fought them?

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