



IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLADE

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Dear Teacher:

When they were not much older than your students, some 3.2 million young Americans were sent Southeast Asia to take their part in the Vietnam War. Three decades later *In the Shadow of the Blade* undertook an effort to learn what had become of the veterans of a brutal, controversial war that lasted nearly ten years, killed more than 40,000 Americans, and left the nation divided. An iconic symbol of the war—a UH-1 “Huey” helicopter—was restored, then flown on a 10,000 mile journey across America to carry war veterans and families as a catalyst for collecting their untold stories and reflections.

The experience of being reunited with the machine that had last carried them to war was evocative for the veterans, many of whom had kept their experience silent in a country that had turned against both them and their war. When we asked them the simple question “what does this Huey mean to you?” they answered with their untold stories.

In the Shadow of the Blade offers your students an opportunity to see into the world of a war and its veterans, not from the traditional standpoint of battle maps, geopolitical considerations, or a dry recitation of dates and statistics, but from the very real, very human perspective. Infantry soldiers, helicopter crew members, nurses, Prisoner of War—all are represented in this collection of the ordinary Americans who served the United States of America in its Vietnam War. Many performed extraordinary feats of valor and endured horrific hardships, and many others paid the ultimate sacrifice, leaving loved ones who mourned for them decades later.

Though this film is particular to Vietnam veterans, many universal themes of war emerge: the enduring power of love to overcome adversity, the unflagging allegiance between soldiers, the triumphant endurance of the human spirit. Your students will see the lifelong shadow the war cast on the men who fought it, but they will also observe a deep and enduring pride among those who were called upon at a very young age to put their lives on the line for their country. Bonded by that experience in a nation that did not welcome them as heroes, many Vietnam veterans have found *In the Shadow of the Blade* to be a form of long overdue tribute.

This study guide offers a number of suggestions for ways you can incorporate the film into your classroom studies in social studies and language arts. It includes a viewing guide to help focus students’ attention, a discussion guide, a reading assignment, and a research project. You can use the film in its whole, or choose

particular episodes to show your students. Whether you use *In the Shadow of the Blade* as part of a historical unit of study or as enrichment to literature, be assured that every participant whose oral history is included in the film was fully vetted by an exhaustive process that included review of official military records. The stories in this film are true, and they really happened to the people who tell them.

We hope that *In the Shadow of the Blade* will help your students make a real and lasting connection with those who served, fought and died in the Vietnam War. Should they have the opportunity to visit our nation's capitol, they will find the film's "star," UH-1 10006-091, permanently displayed in the Smithsonian Museum of American History, representing the Vietnam War in the exhibit "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War."

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TEACHERS: We invite you and your students to share your ideas, projects and impressions at www.intheshadowoftheblade.com or on the In the Shadow of the Blade Facebook page.