

**Supporting the novel:**

# **Old Man**

**By David A. Poulsen**

## **Response Activities**

created by Leia Hey and Karen Richardson

# General Activity Guide:

## Activities Before Reading the book:

1. Inquiry - Brainstorm questions about the Vietnam War as a class. What do students know? What do they want to know?  
Fill in the questions (pages 4-5) about the Vietnam War (and other questions posed by students) by researching: “Facts about the Vietnam War” **or** watch one of the many documentaries on Vietnam War.

Documentary Example:

**Published on Dec 21, 2012** Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War  
Canadian television documentary on the Vietnam War which was produced in 1980 by Michael Maclear.

2. Relationship exploration with parents by answering the questions on the worksheet. (page 6)
3. Listen to “Old Man” by Neil Young and research why Neil Young wrote this song. Study the lyrics and explain what this song is saying to the audience in small groups or as a class discussion.

## Activities During Reading the book:

1. Google Map and follow where you are as you are reading the book.
2. Journal of thoughts and feelings. Connections: Text-to-World, Text-to-Text or Text-to-Self. Have students try to make connections to all three categories during the reading.
3. Fill in vocabulary sheets (pages 7-8).

## Culminating Activities (After Reading)

1. Remembrance Day Legion Poster, Essay or Poem for competition.
2. Create a Brochure or media presentation (i.e. Prezi) of Vietnam.
3. In pairs, research soldiers and present an interview with one partner acting as the interviewer and one as the war veteran. This could be done as a podcast. Topic to consider: Why would a soldier go back to Saigon? (Lots of interviews on you tube)

4. Create a Memory Box (real or virtual) containing things that are now important to Nate after his journey with his “Old Man”. Write a description of the items and explain why you have included them.
5. Write an essay that explains David Poulsen’s reason for using the quote from Shakespeare “Fair is foul and foul is fair. Hover through the fog and filthy air.”
6. Write a personal essay or a monologue about overcoming a fear.
7. Research the songs that “the old man” listened by the following artists: Fleetwood Mac, Nickel Back Aerosmith Alan Jackson and Steve Earl. Find out your parents’ favourite bands or songs and the meaning they have for them. Create a musical montage to your parents’ interests.
8. Read Catch 22 by Joseph Heller and do a book report or watch the movie and write a movie review about it.

## **Vietnam War Research Questions**

1. When did the Vietnam War take place?

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2. Where exactly did it take place?

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3. Who was involved?

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4. What caused this war?

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5. How many people died in this war? Soldiers? Civilians?

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6. Why did the United States enter this war?

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7. What was the Gulf of Tonkin Incident?

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8. What was the My Lai Incident about?

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9. What was the Tet Offensive?

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10. What happened at the Kent State Shootings?

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11. What and when was the Fall of Saigon?

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12. What was the Domino Theory?

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13. Who won the Vietnam War? Explain.

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## Parent Relationship Exploration

*Fill in that which applies to you.*

	<b>Dad</b>	<b>Mom</b>
How are you like your parent(s) physically?		
How are you like your parent(s) in the way that you think?		
How are you like your parent(s) in personality or temperament?		
What, if any, interests do you share with your parent(s)?		
What tastes in food or clothing do you share with your parent(s)?		

# War Lingo and other Vocabulary

Alpha-brain- \_\_\_\_\_

Alpa bravo - \_\_\_\_\_

Ba Li- \_\_\_\_\_

Bo Doi - \_\_\_\_\_

Brackish- \_\_\_\_\_

Caca daw- \_\_\_\_\_

“Chinook”- \_\_\_\_\_

Communism- \_\_\_\_\_

Cork- \_\_\_\_\_

C-rations- \_\_\_\_\_

“Charlie”- \_\_\_\_\_

Delta company- \_\_\_\_\_

Dong- \_\_\_\_\_

Dustoff- \_\_\_\_\_

Five O’clock Follies- \_\_\_\_\_

Foxhole- \_\_\_\_\_

Grunts- \_\_\_\_\_

Hanoi Hilton- \_\_\_\_\_

Hue- \_\_\_\_\_

Hueys-\_\_\_\_\_

Huns-F 100's-\_\_\_\_\_

Infiltration-\_\_\_\_\_

Kamikaze-\_\_\_\_\_

LZ-\_\_\_\_\_

Malaria-\_\_\_\_\_

Mortars-\_\_\_\_\_

Moratorium-\_\_\_\_\_

Nipa palms \_\_\_\_\_

NVA-\_\_\_\_\_

Pagodas - \_\_\_\_\_

Unexploded ordnance-\_\_\_\_\_

Shrapnel-\_\_\_\_\_

Stalactites-\_\_\_\_\_

Triple Canopy\_\_\_\_\_

tube houses-\_\_\_\_\_

tunnel rats-\_\_\_\_\_

zulu-\_\_\_\_\_



# War Lingo and other Vocabulary (Key)

**Alpha-brain-** veterans exposed to high levels of war stress

**Alpa bravo** - ambushed

**Ba**—respect for older woman

**Bo Doi** —Uniformed North Vietnamese Army regulars

**Brackish**-distasteful, unpleasant

**Caca daw**- I will kill you.

**“Chinook”**-helicopter with supplies

**Communis-** a theory or system of social organization based on holding all property in common, a classless society

**Cork**-medication given to soldiers so they would not lose control of bowels.

**C-rations-** tin cans (ham and lima beans. ( ham and chokers)

**“Charlie”**-( or Mr. Charlie) slang for Viet Cong. (VC-Victor Charlie)

**Delta Company**-two platoons 90 men—The Fighting Ninth

**Dong-** currency in Vietnam (15000 or 16000 = one American dollar)

**dustoff-** get wounded men out

**Five O’clock Follies-** information given in the lobby of Rex during the war.

**Foxhole**-holes that the soldiers dug to hide from the enemy

**Grunt** —slang term used for American infantry soldier

**Hanoi Hilton** —prison for pilots who had been shot down

**Hue-** a city of South Vietnam

**Hueys-** helicopters used in the Vietnam War

**Huns-F 100**

**Infiltration-**going into places where one is not supposed to go

**Kamikaze-**Japanese pilot trained in WW11 to make suicidal crash attacks

**LZ-**landing zone which was a clearing in the jungle

**Malaria-**an infectious disease caused by mosquitoes

**Mortars-**form of heavy artillery

**moratorium-** a period of time where a certain activity is not allowed

**Nipa palms-** palm tree with long, sharp leaves often used for thatching

**NVA-**acronym for “North Vietnamese Army”

**Pagoda-** a temple or sacred building, usually a pyramid like tower and typically having upward curving roofs over the individual stories.

**Unexploded ordnance-** potentially a bomb that is still hazardous

**Shrapnel** –fragments from an exploded artillery shell, mine or bomb

**Stalctites-**deposits of calcium carbonate and other minerals hanging in caves.

**Triple Canopy-** Jungle that has growth on the ground, at head height and overhead/

**tube houses-** long, narrow apartments

**tunnel rats-**Americans who volunteered to go down into the tunnels to destroy the enemy.

**zulu-** casualty report

## **Parts of the Book**

(Activities to do before, during and after each part)

### ***Last Month of School (Pages 1-25)***

#### **Before:**

1. Each student will be given an envelope. On a piece of paper, write a list of 5 things you want to accomplish in the summer holidays and how you will achieve those 5 things. These are private so when you are finished, put them into the envelopes and address them to yourselves. No one opens up another person's mail right?

#### **During:**

1. Fill in any definitions on Vocabulary sheet.

#### **During or After:**

1. Discussion Questions:

- a. How is your list different or the same as Nate Hoffman's?
- b. How do you feel about Nate's Dad? Mom?
- c. What age do you consider to be old? Why?
- d. What kinds of fears do you have? Why? Did they originate from a childhood experience? What are some common fears?
- e. What did Nate's mom do for a living? What did she want to do? Why do you suppose she did not pursue this career?
- f. Has anyone ever read the novel Catch 22? What is it about?

2. Journal

3. Write about a childhood memory that you think altered your life in some way.

## ***Summer Part I (Pages 26-64)***

### **Before**

1. Since the destination of this part is Tokyo, watch the **YouTube** Video called “Top 10 Attractions Toyko-Japan Travel”

### **During**

1. Fill in any definitions on the Vocabulary sheet.

### **During or After**

#### 1. Discussion Questions

- a. If you were Nate how would you feel about going on a holiday with your Dad for the first time at the age of sixteen?
- b. How would you feel about going to Saigon?
- c. What does Nate mean by that statement: “Maybe that’s how the hotel got its name”?
- d. What do you think of “the old man version” of Tokyo? Did Nate get to see the Top 10 Attractions of Tokyo? Which ones did he see? What else did he learn?
- e. Does anyone know who Dirty Harry is?
- f. “What kind of job?” Nate’s dad never did answer the question. What do you suppose he would have answered?

#### 2. Journal

#### 3. Writing Activity

Warm up: In 2 minutes, write everything that comes into your heads about the word “boring”. It does not need to be in sentences, just write.

Then, write about a time you took a long trip. Where did you go? What did you see? What experiences did you have? What did you do to pass time?

#### 4. Do a sodoku.

#### 5. Do research on Malaria and choose a presentation format to share findings.

## ***Saigon (Pages 64-111)***

### **Before**

1. Predict what one might see in Saigon.
2. Mark the Map activity – follow Nate and the old man through Vietnam.  
<http://www.vietnampix.com/popmap.htm>

### **During**

1. Fill in any definitions on the Vocabulary sheet.
2. Make a list of all the places they visited in Ho Chi Minh City. ( Rex Hotel, City Zoo, Reunification Palace, war Remnant Museum, Dam Sen Park, Cholon, Cu Chi, AH1, Da Nang) – you will choose one to research after reading.

### **After**

1. Discussion questions:
  - a. According to what you just read, how would you explain Ho Chi Minh City to someone else?
  - b. What other things do you think Nate’s dad had on his mind when Nate figured out that he fought in the Vietnam War?
  - c. Why do you think Nate’s dad was so rude to the man from Australia?
  - d. Why would Nate’s dad want him to go through the tunnels when it was obvious he he didn’t want any part of them?
  - e. What do you suppose was in the brief case with the masking tape around it?
2. Take a Rickshaw ride in Saigon  
[Rickshaw ride in Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam HD - YouTube](#)
3. Journal
4. Research any of the places on the list you made while reading this part – choose a media format to present your findings. i.e. [wordle.net](#) to create a visual, [voki.com](#), or [blabberize.com](#) to describe the location in 60 seconds or less (or let a llama do the talking for you!)
5. Research types of booby traps used in the Vietnam War.

## *The A Shau Valley (Pages 112-140)*

### **Before**

1. Mark on the Map

<http://www.vietnampix.com/popmap.htm>

2. Go for a hike to see the rice paddies

**YouTube** video: Trekking the Rice Fields in Sapa, Vietnam (gcawfield1)

### **During**

1. Fill in any vocabulary on the vocabulary sheet.

### **During or After**

1. Discussion Questions:

- a. Were you surprised by the contents of the suitcase? Did you guess correctly?
- b. Has anyone see the movie Hamburger Hill which was actually Hill 937?
- c. Mr. Vinh took Nate and his dad to Hill 453? What does this tell us about the Vietnam War?
- d. Were you shocked to find you that 40 years later there is still unexploded ordnance?
- e. How would you feel if Mr. Vinh was no longer with you? Would you be scared in the jungle if you lost sight of your dad?
- f. “Something was different.” The old man was different. Can you explain what exactly happened to him?
- g. What did Nate find in the foxhole?
- h. Nate wanted to know why his father brought him here. What was his answer?
- i. What was the argument about between Mr. Vinh and Nate’s dad?
- j. What do you suppose Mr and Mrs. Vinh argued about?

2. Journal – perhaps there was a time when you had so much fear that you thought you might be sick?

3. Watch **YouTube** video called Battle of Hamburger Hill 937 DNA Militar (about 27 minutes) Arthur Wiknik Published on **May 13, 2013**

## ***Saigon the Second Time (Pages 141-165)***

### **Before**

1. Make a T-chart of what constitutes a Good Day vs. a Bad Day in your world.

### **During**

1. Fill in any vocabulary on the vocabulary sheet.

### **During or After**

1. Discussion Questions:

- a) How did Jen cover up about ordering a pizza when her Dad answered the phone?
- b) What is the drinking age in Vietnam? Why do you suppose they have very few problems with intoxicated kids getting into trouble?
- c) Why didn't Nate tell Jen about his experience in the jungle?
- d) Would you consider teaching English in Vietnam?
- e) Jen's mom and dad phoned before they came back to the room. Nate feels that was good parenting. What do you think?

2. Journal

3. You have \$20 Canadian. Look at the menu at the Black Cat (Meo Den) restaurant and decide what you would like to order. Create a meal plan to share.

<http://blackcatsaigon.com/>

4. Nate bought his mother a handbag on Street Le Thanh Ton- check out all the activities, shopping and restaurants on this street. Plan a day here.

<http://www.hcmc.com/streets/le-thanh-ton>

## ***Dalut (Pages 166-179)***

## **Before**

1. Discuss “honeymoon hotspots” or where you would like to go on a honeymoon (or a trip).
2. Check out Hang Nga’s Guest House or the Crazy House in Dalat and discuss.

[http://izismile.com/2010/03/18/dalat\\_crazy\\_house\\_in\\_vietnam\\_51\\_pics.html](http://izismile.com/2010/03/18/dalat_crazy_house_in_vietnam_51_pics.html)

## **During**

1. Fill in any vocabulary on the vocabulary sheet.

## **During or After**

1. Discussion Questions:

- a) What things did Nate find out about his dad when they went for a horseback ride?
- b) Why wasn’t Nate interested in the museum part of the Crazy House after they got back?
- c) Why didn’t Nate’s dad want to come back and live with them? What reasons did he give?

2. Journal

3. Research pancreatic cancer. This disease also killed Patrick Swayze, which brought it into the media.

4. Plan your own tour around Dalat using these websites:

<http://greenhorizontours.com/defaulttt.aspx?mboardname=gtgt&midnhom=gt&page=tour>

<http://www.ptv-vietnam.com/product.php?rid=5>

## ***Saigon, The Last Time (Pages 180-210)***

### **During**



1. Fill in any vocabulary on the vocabulary sheet.

## **During or After**

### 1. Discussion Questions:

- a) Why did Nate go to the North American English Language School?
- b) What experience did he have there with An Lien?
- c) What's the story with Nate's Dad and the woman he went to see?
- d) Why would Nate's dad want to go Ba Li's place?
- e) What did Nate find out at the Black Cat about Jen?
- f) How did Nate react to this news?

## ***September-November (Pages 211-217)***

### 1. Discussion Questions

- a) How did Nate make out with his summer list?
- b) Why do you think Nate never called his dad after they got back?

### 2. Journal

## ***November 27***

### 1. Discussion Question

- a) How did you feel about the ending?

### 2. Journal

### 3. Choose one of the following to complete:

- a. *Write a "deleted scene" that may have been in the book.*
- b. *Write an epilogue that could take place one year or more after the book ends.*
- c. *Write a scene from a viewpoint different than the narrator's. Include thoughts on the main character and how your new point of view believes the character to have changed, etc.*