

America at War: *Platoon* - **An Anti War movie**

Seminar: America at War

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1. Introduction

We chose the movie *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone, to deal with the topic of the Vietnam War in school. In our opinion *Platoon* is appropriate to deal with many different topics, e.g. aspects of race and class or the terrors of war and how war changes the nature of human beings, which all belong to the field of Peace Education. The following teaching unit is designed for a tenth grade mainly because of two reasons. First of all the movie is rated for people who are sixteen years and older which means that at the earliest the movie can be shown to a tenth grade. Secondly we decided that some of the scenes are very cruel and horrifying and therefore should not be shown to younger students even though they are exposed to the horrors of war on a daily basis. This is also the reason why we decided to show only parts of the movie to our students.

With the different kinds of tasks in the teaching unit many different fields in the syllabus are covered. The communicative abilities of the students are trained by watching the movie and analysing it in the target language. They are also requested to produce different kinds of written texts, e.g. essays, dialogues or re-designing scenes to train their writing abilities. To successfully cope with the varying tasks the students are asked to use different kinds of information sources to get the information they need. By doing this abilities like skimming and scanning unknown texts are trained. Furthermore the socio-cultural and intercultural competences of the students are trained by talking about an important incident in the history of the United States of America such as the Vietnam War.

2. Information about the author / filmmaker

Jason O'Brian (<http://www.oscarworld.net/ostone/>) calls Stone "one of the only true visionaries left in the contemporary cinema" and furthermore he predicts that Stone's "films' influence will be felt for many years to come". He is known for bringing out the best actors can perform. And Roger Ebert from the Chicago Sun-Times said on December 30, 1986 that "[t]he movie was written and directed by Oliver Stone, who fought in Vietnam and who has tried to make a movie about the war that is not fantasy, not legend, not metaphor, not message, but simply a memory of what it seemed like at the time to him."

(<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19861230/REVIEWS/612300301/1023>)

Oliver Stone, the director of *Platoon* (1986) for which he was honoured with the best director award and nominated for the best script award, belongs to the most controversial and most famous directors in the world. Not only as director but also as producer of several well-known movies (to name just a few: *Conan the Barbarian* 1982, *Scarface* 1983; *Born on the forth of July* 1989) he received three Oscars and more than eight nominations.

The first Oscar he got was for midnight express, best script in 1979; the second for *Platoon*, best director in 1987; and the third for *Born on the fourth of July*, best director in 1990.

He was born on 15 September 1946 in New York City, USA. He entered Trinity School in 1957 and the Hill School in 1960. He attended Yale and dropped out in 1965 after one year of education to go to Saigon and to teach English there. The following year Stone wrote an unpublished novel and lived in Mexico for a brief time. In 1967, he decided to join the Army and enlisted in April of the same year. From 1967 to 1968, Stone would return to Vietnam this time as a soldier. As a member of the 2nd Platoon of Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 25th infantry he took part in the battle of Firebase Burt. After he had been hurt twice he was transferred out of the field and had to do other jobs in the Army.

He served fifteen months in the 25th Infantry Division. He was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for his service in the war.

(vgl: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000231/>;
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Stone)

3. Historical introduction

The storyline of the movie *Platoon* is placed in the year 1967 when the conflict between the Americans and the Vietnamese was at its height.

After “the Gulf of Tonkin Incident” when the American destroyer Maddox was attacked by the Vietnamese in 1964 the US Army forces started to play an active role in the conflict between North and South Vietnam. In the former years the USA were content with supporting the South Vietnamese government with money and weapons until this Americans soldiers were sent to Vietnam. A summary of the most important dates and facts concerning the conflict is listed below.

In *Platoon* widespread views concerning social conflicts were taken on, e.g. the placement of lower class citizens mainly in the infantry or the preference of white Americans taking leadership positions. Another significant aspect that is pointed out in *Platoon* very clearly is the guerrilla war. This way of fighting a war on the one hand was performed almost perfectly by the Vietcong and on the other hand dreaded by the Americans who were forced to fight in unexplored areas.

Chronology of U.S – Vietnam Relations

September, 1940

Japanese troops occupied Indochina, but allowed the French to continue their colonial administration of the area. Japan's move into southern part of Vietnam in July 1941 sparks an oil boycott by the U.S. and Great Britain. The resulting oil shortage strengthened Japan's desire to risk war against the U.S. and Britain.

August, 1945

Japan surrendered. Ho Chi Minh established the Viet Minh, a guerrilla army. Bao Dai abdicated after a general uprising led by the Viet Minh.

September, 1945

Ho Chi Minh read Vietnam's Declaration of Independence to end 80 years of colonialism under French rule and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi. Vietnam was divided into north and south.

November, 1946

Ho Chi Minh attempted to negotiate the end of colonial rule with the French without success. The French army shelled Haiphong harbour in November, killing over 6,000 Vietnamese civilians, and, by December, open war between France and the Viet Minh began.

1950

The U.S., recognizing Bao Dai's regime as legitimate, began to subsidize the French in Vietnam; the Chinese Communists, having won their civil war in 1949, began to supply weapons to the Viet Minh. North Vietnam is supported by China and the Soviet Union; South Vietnam is militarily supported by GB and USA.

The French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. General Vo Nguyen Giap commanded the Viet Minh forces. France was forced to withdraw. The French-Indochina War ended.

1954

The CIA established a military mission in Saigon. Bao Dai selected Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister of his government.

The US had given 300,000 small arms, machine guns and one billion dollars to the war. 80% of the French war effort was financed by the USA.

July, 1954

The Geneva Conference on Indochina declared a demilitarized zone at the 17th parallel with the North under Communist rule and the South under the leadership of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem. Decision to hold elections in two years in a unified Vietnam.

October, 1954

President Dwight D. Eisenhower pledged support to Diem's government and military forces.

1955

The U.S.-backed Ngo Dinh Diem organized the Republic of Vietnam as an independent nation and declares himself as president. He was told by the US to block the elections requested by the Viet Minh.

1956

Fighting between the North and the South began.

1960

The National Liberation Front (NLF)--called the Viet Cong--is founded in South Vietnam (estimated membership by 1962 300,000).

February, 1961

The U.S. military build-up in Vietnam began with combat advisors. President John F. Kennedy declared that they will respond if fired upon.

November, 1963

South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated.

1964

"The Gulf of Tonkin Incident": North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin. Due to these attacks a resolution was passed giving Johnson the power to take military action as he saw fit in Southeast Asia (Tonkin Resolution). US- congress and President Johnson had the army "plenty of rope" for military adoption.

March, 1965

The first American combat troops (200,000 soldiers) arrived in Vietnam.

April, 1965

President Johnson authorized the use of U.S. ground combat troops for offensive operations. The next day he offered North Vietnam aid in exchange for peace. North Vietnam rejected the offer.

October, 1965

Anti-war protests were held in about 40 American cities.

1966

Another 200,000 soldiers were sent to Vietnam

October, 1967

50,000 people demonstrated against the war in Washington, D.C.

January, 1968

"The Tet Offensive": The NLF (National Liberation Front) launched a surprise offensive that carried them into the heart of Saigon demonstrating that the NLF had not been destroyed by the US and their bombings. 40,000 American soldiers were killed and 240,000 wounded. Vietnam casualties were many times as high. The USA was shocked by the strength of North Vietnam.

The American population was more and more against the war. Johnson stopped bombing. Massacre of My Lai occurred, in which unarmed Vietnamese civilians were killed. Richard Nixon became President of the United States. The Paris peace talks began between U. S. and Vietnamese officials.

June, 1969

President Richard Nixon announced the first troop withdrew from South Vietnam

September, 1969

Ho Chi Minh died.

November, 1969

250,000 people demonstrated against the war in Washington, D.C.

May, 1970

Four students were killed by National Guardsmen at Kent State University in Ohio. The killings sparked hundreds of protest activities across college campuses in the United States. Some protesters, like those at the University of New Mexico, were met with violence.

1971

800,000 tones of bombes were dropped by the US on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos

December, 1972

Christmas bombing of Hanoi and North Vietnam began when the US air force aggravated bombing.

The North Vietnamese announced that they will return to Paris if Nixon ends the bombing. The bombing campaign was halted and the negotiators met during the first week of January, 1973.

January, 1973

The United States, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords, ending the American combat role in war. U.S. military draft ended. A cease-fire went into effect five days later.

March, 1973

Last U.S. combat troops left Vietnam.

April, 1975

Saigon fell. U. S. Navy evacuated U.S. personnel and South Vietnamese refugees. The last American combat death in Vietnam occurred. South Vietnamese President

Duong Van Minh surrendered. North Vietnamese forces took over Saigon; South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam, ending the war and reunifying the country under communist control, forming the Independent Socialist Republic of Vietnam. (vgl.: <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1945.html> <http://www.vietnam-war.info/timeline/>)

4. Analysis of the genre

Platoon drama, War or Anti War movie? In our opinion *Platoon* is a film which complies with all the requirements of an Anti-War movie. There is no glorification of the American soldiers, no heroism and rah-rah patriotism which is often shown in American cinemas. Oliver Stone created one of the toughest and most haunting Anti-War movies in history.

Since the character of Chris (Charlie Sheen) is based on the experiences Oliver Stone actually made as a soldier in Vietnam the movie seems to be very authentic. Stone tells the story from the perspective of a soldier fighting in the infantry which allows the viewer to get a closer look at the act of war. Even though the story is told from the perspective of an American soldier the US is not represented as the hero that brings peace. At the same time this perspective allows the viewer to directly experience the cruelty on both sides. One can see how war changes the nature of human beings and brings out the violent and brutal face.

Showing the emotional distress of the soldiers is anything but entertaining to the viewer which also is an indication of the genre of Anti War movies. The incidents in the movie can also be seen as a basis for a discussion about the justification of war in general. Therefore in our opinion the movie *Platoon* has its right to be shown in the classroom as a part of Peace Education.

5. Tasks for the classroom

5.1 Summary of the movie *Platoon*

The story of *Platoon* is for the most part told out of the eyes of an infantry soldier serving in the Vietnam War named Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen). He is a member of the 25th Infantry Division near the Cambodian border in September 1967. Taylor is from a rather wealthy family unlike the other members in his platoon. He drops out of college to volunteer for Vietnam and to do his duty for his country just like his grandfather and his father did in World War I and World War II.

When Chris finally gets to Vietnam he has a pretty rough time at first. His fellow troops do not care about the “new guys”, he gets bitten by ants and gets in trouble for sleeping while being on watch which was actually not his fault but the fault of a soldier named “Junior”. After these events Chris starts to miss home and he questions his decision of going to war. During the movie he narrates his situation by writing letters to his grandmother which are represented as internal monologues.

During his first fight with the Vietcong Chris gets slightly injured and therefore is put on light duty which means that he stays at the base camp. During his light duty he makes friends with “King” and “Big Harold” who introduce him to the “heads”, those GIs who deal with their depression by smoking pot in their bunker. Most of the other troop members come from a poor background being representatives of a country that rejects them and calling themselves “grunts”. Some of them cannot understand why Taylor volunteered for this “shit” and all of them count the days they have left until they finally get sent back home.

The Platoon soon sets out on a new patrol through the jungle. On their patrol they discover a bunker complex of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Sgt. Elias one of the leading characters played by Willem Dafoe goes in to check it out. While they search this place they lose two soldiers because of a mine and discover that one is missing, while moving forward to a nearby village which is supposed to hide Vietnamese soldiers. On their way they discover Manny, the missing soldier, dead, tied to a tree. Arriving at the village the soldiers take out their frustration on the people and their belongings. While questioning one of the men in the village Sgt. Barnes, played by Tom Berenger, shoots the man’s wife in the head and threatens to shoot his daughter. This sets off a fight between Barnes and Elias who does not

agree with Barnes' methods. The conflict between Barnes and Elias divides the troop into two parts, half of them following Barnes and half of them, including Chris, following Elias. The climax of this fight is when Barnes purposefully shoots Elias while the squad is in a combat situation with the Vietnamese. In this same situation Chris for the first time kills one of the enemy soldiers and gets excited about it.

Back at the base camp the "heads" are back at their bunker smoking pot talking about what Barnes did to Elias. Chris presumes that Barnes killed Elias and is very upset about it. The soldiers do not know that Barnes is listening to what they say and walks into the bunker. Barnes challenges the man to kill him and Chris takes up the challenge. Barnes wins the fight and leaves Chris behind with a cut on his face.

The next day the troops head out into the jungle to prepare for their final fight. Almost all of the men get killed during this combat and the Vietnamese seem to overrun the Americans. Chris fights heroically and saves Francis' and his life. The next morning when he wakes up in the jungle he finds Barnes who is injured and commands him to get a medic but Chris shoots him instead.

The final scene is when Chris and all the other injured soldiers are loaded on the helicopters and flown out of the jungle. In his last internal monologue during the helicopter ride Chris thinks about his experiences and the war in general. "The war will always be there the rest of my days."

5.2 Pre-viewing tasks

a) Classroom discussion:

- Purpose: This task is supposed to form an emotional stimulus to create a field of awareness for the new topic concerning the differences between War – and Anti War movies. It helps the students to activate and to share their pre-knowledge about the genre of War - and Anti War movies. The discussion should raise the students' curiosity about the topic that is going to be discussed in the movie. During the class discussion students have to use the target language to express their opinion.

- Product: The outcome of this task is a discussion in class. Possible reactions of the students could be:

Teacher: “What do you already know about War – and Anti-War movies?
What’s the difference?”

Student A: “In my opinion a War movie shows acts of war more patriotically than critically.”

Student B: “An Anti-War movie has its focus on the brutality and absurdity of a War. It shows the suffering of the soldiers and the innocent people.”

Student C: “I am not sure how to differentiate these kinds of movies.”

Teacher: “Think of movies you have already seen? For example
“Apocalypse Now” or “Full Metal Jacket”? What did you feel?”

Student A: “I felt really uncomfortable while watching “Apocalypse Now” at home.

It was kind of “beklemmend” (oppressive).

I guess this was more an Anti-War movie than a War movie”

Student B: “When I watched FMJ I was really shocked.”

Teacher: “You have come up with some good points. Altogether we can say that the characteristics of an Anti-War movie are that it is much more critical and objective but less patriotic than a War movie. Furthermore an Anti-War movie has no heroes and evokes empathy with all those involved. It is hard to clarify who is bad and who is good. Keep this in mind while watching *Platoon*.”

- Process: What do you already know about War – and Anti-War movies?

What are the characteristics?

What movies dealing with the subject of war have you seen so far?

How did you feel while watching the movie?

Discuss with your neighbour first and collect ideas and make notes to have a discussion in class.

b) Create a timeline of the Vietnam War:

- Purpose: To provide the students with necessary background information of the movie's plot we want the students to create a timeline with the most important dates of the Vietnam War. By searching the internet on their own to get information about the topic, the students' learner autonomy is supported. Cognitive skills are trained as well when the students have to decide which dates are important and which are less important.

- Product: A poster designed by the different groups the students are divided in; following a presentation in class.

Timeline

Group 1	Group 2
<p>September, 1945</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh read Vietnam's Declaration of Independence to end 80 years of colonialism under French rule and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi. Vietnam was divided into north and south.</p> <p>November, 1946</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh attempts to negotiate the end of colonial rule with the French without success. The French army shells Haiphong harbour in November, killing over 6,000 Vietnamese civilians, and, by December, open war between</p>	<p>1964</p> <p>"The Gulf of Tonkin Incident": North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the U.S. destroyer <i>Maddox</i> in the Gulf of Tonkin. Due to these attacks a resolution was passed giving Johnson the power to take military action as he saw fit in Southeast Asia (Tonkin Resolution). US- congress and President Johnson had the army "plenty of rope" for military adoption.</p> <p>March, 1965</p> <p>The first American combat troops (200,000 soldiers) arrive in Vietnam.</p>

<p>France and the Viet Minh began.</p> <p>1950 North Vietnam was supported by China and the Soviet Union; South Vietnam was militarily supported by GB and USA.</p> <p>The French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. General Vo Nguyen Giap commanded the Viet Minh forces. France was forced to withdraw. The French-Indochina War ended.</p> <p>1954</p> <p>The CIA established a military mission in Saigon. Bao Dai selected Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister of his government.</p> <p>The US had given 300,000 small arms, machine guns and one billion dollars to the war. 80% of the French war effort was financed by the USA.</p> <p>July, 1954</p> <p>The Geneva Conference on Indochina declared a demilitarized zone at the 17th parallel with the North under Communist rule and the South under the leadership of Prime Minister Ngo</p>	<p>October, 1965</p> <p>Anti-war protests were held in about 40 American cities.</p> <p>1966</p> <p>Another 200,000 soldiers were sent to Vietnam</p> <p>October, 1967</p> <p>50,000 people demonstrated against the war in Washington, D.C.</p> <p>January, 1968</p> <p>"The Tet Offensive": The NLF (National Liberation Front) launched a surprise offensive that carried them into the heart of Saigon demonstrating that the NLF had not been destroyed by the US and their bombings. 40,000 American soldiers were killed and 240,000 wounded. Vietnam casualties were many times as high. The USA was shocked upon the strength of North Vietnam.</p> <p>The American population was more and more against the war. Johnson stopped bombing. Massacre of My Lai, where unarmed Vietnamese civilians were</p>
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<p>Dinh Diem. Decision to hold elections in two years in a unified Vietnam.</p> <p>1956 Fighting begins between the North and the South.</p> <p>1960 The National Liberation Front (NLF)-called the Viet Cong-was founded in South Vietnam (estimated membership by 1962 300,000).</p> <p>February, 1961 The U.S. military build-up in Vietnam begins with combat advisors. President John F. Kennedy declares that they will respond if fired upon.</p> <p>1964 "The Gulf of Tonkin Incident": North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the U.S. destroyer <i>Maddox</i> in the Gulf of Tonkin. Due to these attacks a resolution was passed giving Johnson the power to take military action as he saw fit in Southeast Asia (Tonkin Resolution). US- congress and President Johnson have the army "plenty of rope" for military adoption.</p>	<p>killed. Richard Nixon became President of the United States. The Paris peace talks begin between U. S. and Vietnamese officials.</p> <p>November, 1969 250,000 people demonstrated against the war in Washington, D.C.</p> <p>January, 1973 United States, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam signed Paris Peace Accords, ending American combat role in war. U.S. military draft ends. A cease-fire went into effect five days later.</p> <p>1975 North Vietnamese forces take over Saigon; South Vietnam surrenders to North Vietnam, ending the war and reunifying the country under communist control, forming the Independent Socialist Republic of Vietnam.</p>
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- Process: Search the internet to create a Vietnam War timeline with the most important dates.

Group 1: Look at the years 1945 to 1964; choose at least five dates you think are important for the development of the conflict between the US and Vietnam.

Group 2: Look at the years 1964 to 1975; choose at least five dates you think are important for the development of the war.

Design a poster with the dates you have chosen and be prepared to present it to your class mates.

Start your search on these pages:

<http://www.vietnam-war.info/timeline/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001292.html>

<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/photoessay.htm>

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1945.html>

Of course you are welcome to use other pages as well.

At first the class has to be divided in group 1 and group 2. These groups have to be split up in smaller workgroups with five people the most. To get the students started during class it is important to have a computer room with internet access ready.

It is necessary to provide helpful internet addresses to get the students started with their work. The students are supposed to evaluate the results of their internet research on posters. Therefore it is important to provide the necessary material for designing of the posters. To recognize the students' work the posters will be hung up in the classroom afterwards.

5.3 While-viewing tasks

a) Discussion:

- Purpose: To have the students watch the scenes attentively we designed while – viewing tasks. The first question deals with the topic of the Vietnamese soldiers and how their acts of war are represented in the selected scenes. In contrast to simply collecting dates and facts this task has its focus on the affective skills of the students. It is important to understand the situation of the American soldiers and the constant fear and pressure of being attacked surprisingly by the enemy. Our aim is to have the students discuss the matter of how the Vietcong are represented. The students have to detect the characteristics of the Guerrilla War that took place in Vietnam. During the class discussion students have to use the target language to express their opinion.

- Product: The students are supposed to take notes while watching the scenes to be prepared to discuss them afterwards. Section of a potential discussion:

Teacher: “What kind of war are the Vietcong and the Americans fighting in?”

Student A: “In the first Scene, we saw, the American soldiers were lying in an ambush and hiding from their enemies.”

Student B: “But maybe they were waiting to attack them?!”

Student C: “Chris (Charlie Sheen) was very afraid when he saw the enemy coming right towards him. I guess the whole Platoon was afraid of being attacked surprisingly by the Vietnamese soldiers.

Teacher: “And what do you think about the Vietnamese camp they found?”

Student A: “It wasn’t a real camp – it was more a huge complex below the earth. How amazing that the Vietcong dug such burrows.”

Teacher: “Yes they had kind of huge colonies under the earth. Just to hide from the Americans and being disguised perfectly.”

Student D: “They lived in those holes and planned their attacks, didn’t they?”

Student E: "Right I think so, too. You can say they didn't fight in a one on one war in open battlefields."

Student B: "I have heard of equal war actions. It is called Guerrilla War, isn't it?"

Student F: "Yes, it is a procedure of hiding and attacking from ambush to surprise the enemy. And when they did so they are going to hide quickly in their ambush again."

- Process: While watching the scenes focus on how the war is represented.

What is special about the Vietnamese soldiers? Are there differences between the American soldiers and the Vietnamese soldiers? Where and how does the act of war take place mainly? Take notes to be prepared to discuss this topic afterwards.

The tasks have to be given to the students before watching the scenes. It is also important to give the students a couple of minutes to read the task. When they are finished with reading through the task scenes 6, 10, 19 and 27 are shown to them.

Concerning the work with the movie it is a matter of course that a TV set including a DVD-player is provided in the classroom. Furthermore the scenes in our tasks are to be shown at least twice.

Our advice would be to show the scene once. Then give the students enough time to work on their task. After that show the scene again and if requested by the students a third time.

b) Essay writing:

- Purpose: In order to deal with the topic from different perspectives and to build up empathy with the characters the students are supposed to write an essay. To understand the way the soldiers act the students have to fulfil a change of perspectives. The chosen scenes also help to visualize the difference of a War – and an Anti-War movie because the American soldiers are not pictured as heroes but as cruel and brutal maniacs.

- Product: The students have to produce a written text in the target language.

In the scenes that we have watched you can observe that the American soldiers treat the Vietnamese people very badly. They appear to be very cruel and violent even against children and women. I wouldn't have thought that the soldiers treat civilians like that and it was very disturbing to me to see that. I think that while being in this war people get crazy. They bear so much pressure to make sure that they stay alive that sometimes they crack up. Somehow I can understand that they act that way because they never know who their friend is and who works for the Vietcong. They don't know who they can trust and who will kill them the moment they turn their backs at them. But still this scene shows how terrible war can be, for the soldiers and especially for the innocent civilians.

- Process: Write an essay (at least one page) about how the Americans treat the Vietnamese civilians in the scenes you have just watched. In your opinion is the way the Americans treat the Vietnamese appropriate?
Considering the situation of the *Guerrilla War* and the constant pressure the Americans have to deal with can you imagine a reason why the soldiers act that way.

The tasks have to be given to the students before watching the scenes. It is also important to give the students a couple of minutes to read the task. When they are finished with reading through the task scenes 13 (46:22 – 47:43), 14 and 16 are shown to them.

c) Analyse the aspects of race and class:

- Purposes: By watching the scenes the students are supposed to get an idea of who fought in the Vietnam War. These scenes show a discrepancy between most of the white American soldiers and the ethnic minority groups. Those groups who "came from the bottom of the line" were not accepted in their own country but were supposed to fight for this country in Vietnam. The students have to produce a written text in the target language to express their opinion. The internet research is supposed to help the students to support or do disprove the impressions they gained from selected scenes. The collected facts help the students form their own opinion whether the movie is authentic or not. The ability to use new media e.g. the internet is trained.

- Product: Written text about who is fighting in Vietnam and the relation between the white American soldiers and soldiers from other ethnic minority groups, presented in selected scenes of *Platoon*. Follow up Internet research to gather statistical facts concerning the percentage of white American soldiers and members of other ethnic minority groups.

Statements from the movie:

- Chris: "... guys nobody really cares about." (scene 5)
- Chris: "Most come from the end of the line." (scene 5)
- Chris: "Most have got nothing. They are poor. They are unwanted." (scene 5)
- Chris: "At the bottom of the barrel, and they know it. ... they're called "grunts". " (scene 5)
- King: " Taylor, how the fuck you get here, anyway? You look educated."
Chris: "I volunteered." (scene 8)
- Chris: "Why should just the poor kids go off to war and the rich kids get away with it?" (scene 8)

- King: "Everybody know the poor always been fucked over by the rich. Always have, always will." (scene 8)
- Sgt. Barnes: "I'm gonna court-martial your nigger ass."
- Junior: "You white folks have got your last klik outta Junior!" (scene 25)

Internet research results:

<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=4496> (pro white)

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/africanamer.htm (pro blacks):

"The Vietnam War saw the highest proportion of blacks ever to serve in an American war. During the height of U.S. involvement, 1965-69, blacks, who formed 11 percent of the American population, made up 12.6 percent of the soldiers in Vietnam. The majority of these were in the infantry, and although authorities differ on the figures, the percentage of black combat fatalities in that period was a staggering 14.9 percent, a proportion that subsequently declined. Volunteers and draftees included many frustrated blacks whose impatience with the war and the delays in racial progress in America led to race riots on a number of ships and military bases, beginning in 1968, and the services' response in creating interracial councils and racial sensitivity training." (John Sibley Butler)

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VNprotest.htm> (pro black):

"Therefore, blacks were fighting in Vietnam "for something they don't have for themselves." (Eldridge Cleaver)

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VietnamWar.htm>:

"As a consequence of the actions of wealthy Americans, most soldiers who went to Vietnam came from working, rather than middle-class homes. Ethnic minorities were also more likely to serve in Vietnam than white Americans."

- Process: While you watch the following scenes write down statements that describe who is fighting in Vietnam. What can you guess about the soldiers? What part of society do they come from? To answer those questions also have a critical eye on the language used by certain characters. Describe the relation between the soldiers. What is typical about it? Search the internet for facts to support or deny your opinion.

Google: "How many blacks in Vietnam War"

<http://www.vhfcn.org/stat.html>

http://www.americansc.org.uk/Online/Forum/Vietnam_War.htm

<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=4496>

(pro white)

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/africanamer.htm

(pro blacks)

The tasks have to be given to the students before watching the scenes. It is also important to give the students a couple of minutes to read the task. When they are finished with reading through the task scenes 5, 8 and 25 (1:28:30 – 1:29:43) are shown to them. To get the students started during class it is important to have a computer room with internet access ready. It is necessary to provide helpful internet addresses to get the students started with their work.

5.4 Post-viewing tasks

a) Essay writing

- Purpose: To bring the topic to an end and to sum up all the work that has been done concerning the Anti-War genre the students have to write a final essay. They have to use and reflect the materials they have collected during their whole work and apply it to the movie *Platoon*.

- Product: The students are supposed to write an essay to express their opinion in the target language.

From the scenes we have watched during the past weeks I would say that *Platoon* is a very good example for an Anti-war movie for several reasons.

At first one can say that none of the characters in the movie is a real hero. Elias who appears to be a good guy, not torturing innocent people and trying to help Chris, is taking drugs to escape from the cruel war reality. The leading character Chris does have some good sides as well for example when he saves the Vietnamese girls from being raped by the other soldiers but then again when they are at the Vietnamese village he also tortures that poor guy who has got only one leg. Moreover he shows his fear of getting killed and how terrifying it is to be at war which is unusual for a "real Hollywood hero".

Furthermore the whole conflict between the North Vietnamese and the American soldiers is more critically and objectively than patriotically presented to the viewers. The Americans do not appear as the good guys who save the South Vietnamese people and the Vietcong as the bad, conscienceless killers. Things like drug abuse, the conflicts within the group of the soldiers and the way they treat each other and the very cruel behaviour towards the Vietnamese civilians make the soldiers appear very crazy and inhuman. But on the other hand the same things also make them appear very human and the viewer feels with

them and can understand their behaviour to a certain extent. The viewer can experience how terrible it is to be at war and how it changes the nature of human beings. Never to know who is your friend and who is the enemy. Never to know when and where the enemy strikes next. Never being able to relax. Trying to escape reality by taking drugs.

In the end I would say that this movie draws a very cruel, inhuman and terrifying picture of war which is very realistic picture I guess!

- Process: After all the scenes you have watched so far and all the work you have done we want you to write a short essay (about two paragraphs) expressing your opinion whether *Platoon* is an Anti-War or a War movie. Keep in mind our discussion at the very beginning of the topic when we talked about what features an Anti-War or a War movie should have.

Helping to remember the discussion at the very beginning of the teaching unit together with the students the typical characteristics of the genre are collected at the blackboard again. After that the students are prepared to write their essay on their own. It would be good to have the students start their essays during class in case there are any unanswered questions left.

b) Design a scene for the beginning and the ending of the movie:

- Purpose: To realize our main aim of "Peace Education" the students are supposed to change perspectives one last time. They are supposed to put themselves into Chris' position. By doing that they should understand the meaning and the seriousness of being a soldier fighting in a war. Moreover they can experience how war changed the character of Chris and that the war will always be a part of his life.

- Product: A written script of new scenes and a role play by the students.

One possible result of the group work is presented and acted out by four students. Two of them are presenting the "beginning scene" and two of them the end.

Dialogue 1: The beginning of the movie

Chris is visiting his Grandma after volunteering to be a soldier in the Vietnam War.

Chris: "Hello Grandma, how are you?"

Grandma (happy to see Chris): "Hello Chris nice to see you. I'm fine and how are you sweet?"

Chris (with a serious expression on his face): "Granny I have got serious news for you."

Grandma (looking tensely - sitting down)

Chris: "I just dropped out of college and signed up for Vietnam. I'm going to leave you in five days."

Grandma (absolutely shocked - staring at Chris): "You can't be serious! Why are you doing this?"

Chris (with a lump in his throat): "I don't wanna be as mom and dad want me to. I want to serve my country just like grandpa did in "World War I" and dad did in "World War II". I don't want to be one of those rich guys sitting back watching others die for our country. I wanna do something meaningful in my life!"

Grandma (with tears in her eyes)

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Dialogue 2: The ending of the movie

Chris is visiting his Grandma after returning from Vietnam.

Chris (wearing his Uniform - walking towards Granny's house)

- Process: We want you to create a new script for the beginning and the ending of the movie. Imagine you are Chris Taylor talking to your Grandmother before leaving to go to Vietnam and after returning from Vietnam. Write one dialogue between Chris and his Grandmother in which Chris tells her what he expects to find and to experience in Vietnam. Write another dialogue where he talks about his impressions and experiences being at war. Since you are supposed to act it out in front of the class also think of facial expressions e.g. gestures and body language. Be creative and have fun! 😊

To clarify Chris' opinion concerning the Vietnam War scene 5 and scene 31 have to be shown to the students before they start working on their final task.

6. Bibliography

- [http://www.americansc.org.uk/Online/Forum/Vietnam War.htm](http://www.americansc.org.uk/Online/Forum/Vietnam_War.htm);
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- http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/africanamer.htm;
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- <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/photoessay.htm>;
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- <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=4496>;
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- <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1945.htm>;
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- <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001292.html>; letzter Zugriff: 11.03.06
- <http://www.oscarworld.net/ostone/>; letzter Zugriff: 04.03.06
- <http://www.vhfcn.org/stat.html>; letzter Zugriff: 10.03.06
- <http://www.vietnam-war.info/timeline/>; letzter Zugriff: 10.03.06
- [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver Stone](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Stone); letzter Zugriff: 12.03.06

Commented bibliography:

In order to deal with the Vietnam War we regard the following pages as very helpful to acquire important background information. These pages help to introduce you to this huge topic and to get a general idea of the development of the Vietnam War.

- <http://www.vietnam-war.info/timeline/>
- <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001292.html>
- <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/photoessay.htm>
- <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1945.html>

Besides the pages that only list dates and facts we regard this page (<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/photoessay.htm>) as very important as

well. Not only to shock but to illustrate that this war was for real, cruel and brutal. These pictures spark interest in what was happening in Vietnam and maybe lead to challenge the sense of the war.

In order to deal with our chosen movie *Platoon* we regard these pages as useful to collect background information about the director Oliver Stone and his experiences made in Vietnam as an American soldier. Furthermore these pages are appropriate to help the students understand the plot of the movie since we are not going to watch the entire movie.

- <http://www.oscarworld.net/ostone/>
- <http://www.filmstarts.de/kritiken/Platoon.html>
- <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091763/>