I ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR STUDENTS BEFORE YOUR VISIT

I MUST-READ INFORMATION TO HELP YOU PREPARE

I WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET TO THE MUSEUM

I CONNECTIONS TO OTHER PLACES IN THE MUSEUM

I TIES TO NEW YORK STATE STANDARDS

I PRE-, DURING-, AND POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES, VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.AMNH.ORG/RESOURCES/EXHIBITIONS/VIETNAM
The four journeys described in the exhibition section of this guide are color-coded to the areas shown on this map.

- **Journeys Through Time**
- **Journeys of Peoples and Goods**
- **Rites of Passage as Life Journeys**
- **Journeys of Spirits and Souls**

**Exhibition Section Titles**

1. **Mid-Autumn Festival**
2. **Journeys of Peoples & Goods**
3. **Journeys of Gods & Ancestors**
4. **Life Journeys**
5. **Shamanic Journeys**
6. **Community Gods on Parade**

**Entrance**

**Exit**

**Water Puppets**

**Sapa Market**

**Yao Initiation**

**Giarai Funeral**

**Len Dong Ritual**

**Ky Yen Ritual**

**Mid-Autumn Festival**
Teaching Vietnam

A land of rich traditions and diverse landscapes and people, Vietnam is a vibrant country in the midst of tremendous change. Vietnam’s population is young: the majority was born after 1975. For many Americans, the word Vietnam automatically triggers images of the Vietnam American war. A major goal of this exhibition is to provide a broader, more contemporary view of Vietnam as a dynamic, multicultural nation participating in a global marketplace. The beautiful and useful objects in the exhibition—from toys to ceramics, from clothing to ritual items—are windows through which your students can increase their knowledge and understanding of Vietnamese culture. Familiarize your class with the content of the exhibition before you come (see Before Your Visit). Learn about the exhibition at www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vietnam.

Learning about other cultures is also an important way to examine the values and customs of your own culture. Therefore, the suggested activities in this guide encourage students to ask questions about their own values and experiences as they reflect on the sights and sounds of the exhibition through the photos, videos, and items on display.

Teaching in the Museum

As an informal learning environment, the Museum offers many opportunities for self-directed learning through the exploration of questions such as “What is culture?” and “What is tradition?” Build flexibility into your plans to allow students to follow their interests. Explainers (most of whom speak both English and Vietnamese) will be present in the exhibition to provide additional information and answer questions.

The second most populous country in Southeast Asia, Vietnam contains almost 80 million people within an area about the size of New Mexico. Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind & Spirit portrays the diverse peoples of Vietnam, reflecting the country’s distinctive cultural identity and conveying its long history. The exhibition is a joint project of the American Museum of Natural History and the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi, which furnished many of the exhibition materials, including artifacts, photographs, and videos. The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology is a new museum that highlights the ethnic groups of Vietnam and presents contemporary culture as well as traditional practices.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

- The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a multietnic country of 54 recognized ethnic groups—categories of people who see themselves as sharing a culture, history, and identity that differentiates them from other groups or from the larger society as a whole. The official language is Vietnamese, and Vietnam prides itself on its high literacy rate of around 85 percent.

- Like all cultures, Vietnam’s culture is fluid, adaptive, and alive. The culture of a country has not one but many expressions. This is as true for Vietnam as it is for the United States. Traditions vary within Vietnamese culture, particularly from region to region. People move and times change, transforming cultural traditions.

- At different times in its history, Vietnam has incorporated elements of both Chinese and Indian culture and religion.

- There are many religions in Vietnam, including Daoism; Buddhism; Catholicism; Islam; Hinduism; a variety of folk practices, especially ancestor veneration; and Confucianism, an ancient Chinese social philosophy.

- For many Vietnamese, familial relationships extend beyond death. The living make offerings to ancestors at household altars. In return, the ancestors help protect the family.

COMMERCE

- Although Vietnam follows socialist economic principles, the country entered the global marketplace in 1986. Doi Moi, or “Renovation,” is the reform movement that encouraged individual responsibility in agriculture and led Vietnam from a state-subsidized to a market economy. Since then, Vietnam has undergone enormous economic change.

- Largely agrarian—or agricultural—about 80 percent of Vietnam’s population lives in the countryside, and more than half its people are engaged in agriculture.

- In the central highlands, farmers plant tea, coffee, sugarcane, pepper, peanuts, and other cash crops—crops grown primarily to sell at market. Farmers also tap trees for rubber, another major export.

- Vietnam has two major urban centers: the capital Hanoi (population 3 million) in the north and Ho Chi Minh City (population 5 million), with the largest concentration of urban industry and business, in the south. Danang, on the central coast, is also a major city and port.

GEOGRAPHY

- The Vietnamese see their country as having three geographical areas: the north or Bac Bo; the center or Trung Bo; and the southern portion or Nam Bo.

- The rich soil of the north’s Red River and south’s Mekong River deltas—soil deposits carried by a network of streams at the mouth of some rivers—provide fertile ground for rice farmers. Rice, in its many varieties, is a vital part of Vietnam’s culture, economy, and landscape. A leading export, it is grown on three-quarters of the country’s farmland.

- Vietnam’s extensive coastline supports fishing and other maritime—relating to the sea—industries. Its accessible ports have been gateways for trade and cultural influences.

- A quarter of Vietnam’s population lives in highland—or mountainous—areas. Mountain ranges run from north to south, separating Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia. Another mountain range crosses northern Vietnam from southern China.
The following discussion/activity suggestions will provide excellent review the vocabulary in bold throughout this guide.

1. Ask students to work in pairs to create a list of the celebrations and holidays which mark their journeys through time. Ask students to share their lists with the class, and discuss the variety of ways in which we celebrate these important events.

2. Careful observation of exhibition objects will provide students with important insights into learning about material culture. Ask students to practice their observation skills by bringing in an object from home that has personal significance for them. Ask students to describe and draw their objects in detail, with attention to material, form, use, and function. Then ask students to switch objects with another student and repeat the activity.

3. Initiate an age-appropriate discussion about key terms such as culture, traditions, symbols, and rites of passage. For example, ask: What is tradition? How are new family traditions created? After the discussion, start a classroom tradition such as a weekly or monthly event.

4. Ask students to work in pairs to create a list of the celebrations and holidays which mark their journeys through time. Ask students to share their lists with the class, and discuss the variety of ways in which we celebrate these important events.

5. Review the vocabulary in bold throughout this guide.

6. The following discussion/activity suggestions will provide excellent comparison points for students while they are in the museum and after their visit.

7. Ask students what they know about Vietnam. Make a list on the blackboard and ask students to copy the list. Have students cite the sources of their information, such as parents, newspapers, books, or personal experiences.

8. Distribute copies of the map insert, or display a large map of Vietnam. Ask students to identify the geographical features of the country, such as its size, shape, rivers, coastline, mountains, and neighboring countries. What ideas about industries, occupations, transportation, or food resources does the map suggest? List these on the board.

9. Ask each student to bring in an image of Vietnam from a magazine, newspaper, travel brochure, book, or Web site. Ask students to work in pairs and write down ways in which these images show similarities to their own lives—and ways in which they are different. Ask students to write down any conclusions they can draw about how Vietnamese people live in the countryside and in cities. Open a discussion about how Vietnam is portrayed in these images, and what ideas about the country they may suggest.
**RITES OF PASSAGE AS LIFE JOURNEYS**

Coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, and funerals are all **rites of passage**—ceremonies that mark transitions from one stage of life to another. Different regions and ethnic groups in Vietnam practice different ceremonies. Several minority groups in Vietnam use the idea of a journey to mark the space between life and death. Ask students to note the tall decorated poles erected by the Thai at the tomb to help souls ascend to the ancestors in the sky.

Rites of passage also change. Cultural fashions are evident in ceremonies such as the Kinh wedding, at which it is now in vogue to take "Hollywood"-style photos. Another new tradition is to have all guests at a wedding sign a tablecloth. Ask students if they are familiar with similar occasions in the United States at which people collect signatures, such as in yearbooks or guest books. What might be the reason(s) for this custom?

**Votives**—items burned as offerings for the dead—continue to change so that the dead can also make use of newly available commodities. Today, paper votives may take the shapes of VCRs, luxury cars, and cell phones. This exhibition section also contains a memorial to the "wandering ghosts"—those who died under violent circumstances and have not received proper burials.

The Giarai minority group of the central highlands sends the dead on a journey to the land of the ancestors with an elaborate ceremony in which a grave house and wooden mortuary sculptures are created. Consider what the five mortuary statues on display convey about the Giarai’s view of the afterlife.

**JOURNEYS OF SPIRITS AND SOULS**

Festivals that engage the spirit world enhance people’s lives with a sense of esteem, continuity, and community. The exhibition presents examples of ways in which spirits are invited to journey to present-day ritual sites to manifest themselves and in which spirits are honored in village festivals. For instance, a water puppet performance celebrated in the Chua Thay Festival honors the creator of the water puppet tradition, the monk Tu Dao Hanh. And in fishing villages along Vietnam’s south and central coast, "Sir Fish" festivals honor the spirit of the whale who keeps fishermen safe and helps them to prosper. Students can examine these festivals more closely at a media station in the Community Gods on Parade section, which offers four different videos with cultural information about these and other festivals.

Many Vietnamese believe that people have multiple souls and that when some of these souls leave the body, illness results. The Tay people of northeastern Vietnam hold a ritual, Ky Yen, in which a **shaman**—an individual who has direct personal experiences of the supernatural—retrieves a person’s missing soul and may conduct a rite to insure good luck and health. In this ritual, as illustrated in a nearby video, the entranced shaman leads a spirit army on a series of adventures. In the different shamanic Len Dong ritual of the Kinh people, spirits from different cosmic realms are entertained with dances, songs, and lively audience interaction.

**while you’re at the museum**

- Break students into small groups or pairs, and assign each group one of the four suggested "journeys" through the exhibition (see the Exhibition section). With a large class, multiple groups may work on the same journey. Ask each group to collect information and the main ideas of the journey. Have students record what interests them most about each journey, and what questions they have.

- Throughout the exhibition, displays illustrate new traditions that have been incorporated into Vietnamese culture. Ask students to locate and record examples of these new traditions. These might include plastic masks of characters from popular culture or modern "Hollywood"-style wedding photos.

- Objects can be expressions of a culture. Ask students to select an object or a group of related objects that they find particularly interesting. Students should record a detailed description of its physical appearance (including its form, composition, and function) through words and drawings. Ask them to answer: How was the object made? What cultural meanings and values are attached to it? Think about an object in American culture used for a similar purpose.

- Ask students to work in pairs, and compare the photos and images in the exhibition to the ones they collected before their visit. Ask them to record what they find surprising or most interesting about the differences between their images and those in the exhibition. Have them write down any opinions and thoughts they might have about the photos in the exhibition. Ask if there were any photos they would have liked included in the exhibition that were not.
A follow-up discussion to "Before Your Visit": Ask students to compare the notes they made before their visit to what they learned at the exhibition. Ask them specifically what new or surprising knowledge they gained.

A follow-up activity for "While You’re at the Museum": Ask the pairs of students who recorded their “journey” findings together at the museum to present their observations and questions to the class. Discuss possible answers to these questions with the class.

A follow-up activity with the images collected in "Before Your Visit" and "While You’re at the Museum": Ask the pairs of students who investigated and took notes about the exhibition images to present their findings to the class. Have students refer to the images that were collected before the visit and the drawings made at the exhibition to aid in the discussion.

Invite Vietnamese and/or Vietnamese-Americans (relatives of students, if possible) from your community to talk to the class about their lives, backgrounds, and cultures. Build in time for students to ask questions.

Break students into small groups or pairs. Ask each group to choose a city or region in Vietnam to research. Using impressions from the exhibition as a starting point, ask them to collect images, historical background on the region, and other information that they find interesting, and then present their findings to the class.

Divide students into groups and ask them to write a brief outline for organizing a museum exhibition about culture in the United States. Ask them to consider a main theme or topic for their exhibition. What objects would they include to best illustrate that theme? Ask them to list reasons for their particular choices.

For older students:

Both Vietnam and the United States are multiethnic countries. Research the differences between minorities in Vietnam and those in the United States with reference to their origins, geographical distribution, languages, and customs. Students can share the results of their research with the class.

Traditions are never static. Ask students to identify one or more traditions that have changed in their own families, such as a family anniversary or holiday. Why did this tradition change? How are these reasons similar to or different from changes in tradition that they discovered in the exhibition? In general, why do traditions undergo change?

Links to New York State Standards
The exhibition and the activities in this guide fulfill the following standards:

Social Studies Standards for Elementary, Middle School, High School
STANDARD 1: History of the United States and New York
STANDARD 2: World History
STANDARD 3: Geography
STANDARD 4: Economics

Arts Standards Elementary and Middle School
STANDARD 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Resources:
For a book list, related Web sites, and additional activities visit: www.amnh.org/resources/exhibitions/vietnam

Photo Credits: Cover – clockwise from top left – cultivating rice near Saigon, celebrating Tet with sparklers, pilgrims boat to the Perfume Pagoda during Tet, Ellen Kaplowitz; boys raised in a Buddhist temple, Nguyen Hong Sam; embroidered shaman’s vest, Barry Landua, AMNH

Key Concepts – old woman selling calendars, Ellen Kaplowitz; billboards in Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Hong Sam

Exhibition – first page – Hmong child, Claire Burket; painting of a dog, Craig Chesek, AMNH; transporting melons by boat, Jerry Seiser

Floor plan page – Artifact photos, Craig Chesek, AMNH

Back cover – top: Yao Red children, Andy Schmid, AMNH; bottom: harvesting fields, Jerry Seiser; opera troupe actor, John Klein; travelling to market in the Mekong Delta, Ellen Kaplowitz

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The "S" shape of Vietnam is often said to look like two rice baskets on a pole. The north and south regions—which possess the major deltas where much of the rice is grown—are the rice baskets, and the central region is the pole.

Location:
Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea, alongside China, Laos, and Cambodia

Area:
total: 329,560 sq km
land: 325,360 sq km
water: 4,200 sq km

Area - comparative:
slightly larger than New Mexico

Coastline:
3,444 km (excludes islands)

Climate:
tropical in south; monsoonal in north with hot, rainy season (mid-May to mid-September) and warm, dry season (mid-October to mid-March)

Terrain:
low, flat delta in south and north; central highlands; hilly, mountainous in far north and northwest

Geography - note:
extending 1,650 km north to south, the country is only 50 km across at its narrowest point
**HISTORICAL TIMELINE**

**300,00 BC  Prehistory**
First inhabitants. Farming, pottery and metalworking develop.

**800 BC  Early states period**
Small states rise and fall. Chinese invasions.

- **Terra cotta bowl**
  Oc Eo, where this bowl was found, was a flourishing port in what is now southwestern Vietnam between 0 and A.D.500. Part of a maritime civilization whose trade network stretched from China to the western Mediterranean, Oc Eo was rediscovered by archaeologists in the 1940s. It had been submerged for hundreds of years.

**1000 AD  Monarchy**

- **Woodblock print of Lady Trieu**
  Nineteen-year-old Lady Trieu Thi Trinh led a brave insurrection against the Chinese in the year 248. According to legend she rode her elephant into battle wearing golden armor, a golden scarf and ivory clogs. In Vietnam Lady Trieu is a symbol of resistance against foreign invaders.

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**1858  French colonial period**
French dominate first south, then center, then north.

- **The Automobile**
The clothing, vehicles and courtship rituals of the French—a colonial presence from 1859 to 1954—were alien and slightly comical to the Vietnamese.

**1945  Indochina wars**

- **Woodblock print of a literacy class**
  Universal literacy was a top priority for the revolutionary leaders who fought to oust the French between 1945 and 1954. In 2000 the literacy rate of Vietnam was estimated at 85 percent. This woodblock depicts a literacy class for ordinary people.

**1975  Unified Vietnam**
War with Cambodia and China. Refugees depart by sea. Renovation of economy.

- **Toy motorbikes made from recycled aluminum cans**
  Beginning in 1986, the government of Vietnam initiated a series of reforms known as doi moi ("renovation") that included a growing receptivity to foreign investment. The motorbikes that clog the streets of many cities in Vietnam symbolize the changing lifestyle of Vietnamese in the doi moi era.