Leadership and Decision Making

Activity 2: Eisenhower, the French, and Dien Bien Phu

Timeline: 1952-1954

Introduction:

Students examine the impact of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu on US policy in Vietnam.

Materials:

Video Clips:

- French Fight a Dirty War in Vietnam
- Battle at Dien Bien Phu
- Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu

Summarizing Points

- Difficulty for France in recolonizing Vietnam
- French agree to peace talks but try to improve position
- French establish base camp at Dien Bien Phu
- Viet Minh surround the encampment with thousands of troops and artillery

Procedure:

1. Watch the video segments “French Fight a Dirty War in Vietnam” and “Battle at Dien Bien Phu”.

2. Discuss the clips as a class using the summarizing points and explaining that President Eisenhower faced a dilemma similar to President Truman’s. Should he help the French perpetuate an unpopular—and now failing—war to keep their colony; or encourage the French to sue for peace and lose another “domino” to communism.

Tell students: Faced with this decision, President Eisenhower has asked you to make a recommendation. Will you advise him to:

   a) Reject the French request for aid.
   b) Negotiate a settlement between the French and Vietnamese.
   c) Secretly send aid to the French.
**Students can work in groups or individually to determine their recommendation.**  
*They should be prepared to present and defend their decision*

3. Show the last video segment, “Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu,” which reveals what Eisenhower chose to do and why. Have students compare and contrast their decisions with that of Eisenhower and then write a brief analysis of Eisenhower’s and their own decisions.

Post Activity Questions
- What surprised you about the outcome at Dien Bien Phu? Does this outcome change your own decision in any way? Explain
- What is your opinion of President Eisenhower’s decision? Explain. How might Eisenhower’s background have influenced his decision not to aid the French?
- What might have been the outcome if he had chosen a different option, like negotiating a settlement between France and Vietnam or secretly sending aid to the French?
- What do you think should be President Eisenhower’s next move after refusing to aid the French?