Leadership and Decision Making

Activity 6: 1965 Troop Escalations
Timeline: Mid-1965

Students will review the conditions on the ground in Vietnam in mid-1965.

Video Clips:
- Conditions Grow Worse
- Troop Levels

Summarizing Points:
- Situation in South Vietnam is getting worse
- Westmoreland requests more troops
- North Vietnamese implement a strategy of attrition
- China and the Soviet Union send more aid to North Vietnam
- Recommendations from Johnson’s advisors

Activity Procedure
1. View the video segment, “Conditions Grow Worse”

2. Discuss the segment as a class using the summarizing points. Explain to students that while US war effort seems to be waning, but General Westmoreland tells the Johnson administration that the war can be won. He asks for an additional 150,000 troops. Johnson wants to intimidate the North Vietnamese government to force them to the bargaining table, but he is concerned that too large a show of force might bring the Soviet Union and China into the conflict.

Tell Students: President Johnson has asked you to make a recommendation whether to approve the increase in ground troops. Should he:
   a) Agree to Westmoreland’s request of 150,000 ground troops.
   b) Agree to send only a portion of the troops requested.
   c) Send no troops at this time.

Students can work in groups or individually to determine their recommendation. They should be prepared to present and defend their decision

3. Show the final video segment, “Troop Levels,” which reveals what Johnson decided to do and why. Have students compare and contrast their decisions with that of Johnson and then write a brief analysis of Johnson’s and their own decisions.
Post-Activity Questions:

- What surprised you about Johnson’s decision to increase the number of ground troops? Does this change your decision in any way? Explain.
- What is your opinion of Johnson’s decision? Explain.
- What might have been the outcome if Johnson had chosen a different option, like sending no troops or sending the number of troops Westmoreland requested?
- According to Tran Ngoc Toan of the South Vietnamese Marines, what were the additional US troops lacking when they arrived in South Vietnam? How might this have been a problem in achieving their mission?