

Teaching Resource: Voices from a Border War

New Zealand's Role in the Borneo Conflict (1962–1966)

Author: Robert Curr

Publisher: John Douglas Publishing Ltd

Year Level: Years 11–13 (NCEA Levels 1–3)

Lesson Duration: 3 to 4 class periods (50 minutes each)

Curriculum Links

Social Studies (History)

New Zealand and International Conflict

Military History and National Identity

Civics and Citizenship

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson/unit, students will be able to:

Understand the political and military context of the Borneo conflict.

Identify New Zealand's strategic role and military contribution to the Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation.

Evaluate the experiences of New Zealand soldiers through primary-source material.

Examine how personal testimonies shape our understanding of conflict.

Discuss how the Borneo campaign contributed to New Zealand's military legacy and national identity.

Materials Needed

Copies/excerpts of *Voices from a Border War*

Access to maps of Southeast Asia (Borneo, Malaysia, Indonesia)

Projector or interactive whiteboard

Audio recordings or video interviews (if available)

Worksheets and assessment rubric

Lesson Sequence

Lesson 1: Context and Background

Activity Title: “A Forgotten War?”

Focus: Introduction to the Borneo conflict and its geopolitical context

1. Starter (10 mins):

Show map of Southeast Asia. Discuss Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation and Cold War context.

Pose key inquiry question: Why did New Zealand become involved in a conflict so far from home?

2. Main Activity (25 mins):

Teacher presents background on the conflict (British Commonwealth support, Indonesia’s opposition to Malaysia).

Students work in pairs to identify reasons for NZ involvement: regional stability, ANZAM obligations, alliances with Britain and Australia.

3. Wrap-up (15mins):

Class discussion: Was this NZ’s war or someone else’s?

4. Homework:

Read assigned excerpt from *Voices from a Border War* (chapter on patrol experiences in the jungle).

Lesson 2: Voices from the Frontline

Activity Title: “Inside the Green Hell?”

Focus: Exploring soldier experiences from *Voices from a Border War*

1. Starter (5 mins):

Recap previous lesson with 3–2–1 strategy (3 things they learned, 2 questions, 1 surprising fact).

2. Main Activity (35 mins):

Small groups discuss selected excerpts from the book:

Jungle warfare and patrols

Fear, discipline, and camaraderie

Cultural encounters and local populations

Use a worksheet to identify recurring themes: survival, brotherhood, frustration, pride.

3. Wrap-up (10 mins):

Class shares the most striking observations.

Introduce the idea of “invisible wars” — conflicts that aren’t well remembered or taught.

Lesson 3: Reflection and Assessment

Activity Title: “Remembering the Forgotten?”

Focus: Critical response and personal reflection

1. Starter (10 mins):

Play a short video interview with a NZ veteran (or audio, if available).

2. Main Activity (30 mins):

Students write a short reflective essay or personal response:

How did this war impact those who served?

What can we learn from their experiences today?

Should New Zealand commemorate the Borneo conflict more widely?

3. Wrap-up (10mins):

Share responses (voluntary). Discuss remembrance and how we choose which wars to honour publicly

Assesment Options

Formative: Group discussion participation, completed worksheets

Summative: Reflective essay or creative project (e.g. letter from a soldier, podcast script, illustrated map of a patrol route)

Extension Activities

Research project: Compare NZ's involvement in Borneo with Vietnam

Guest speaker (local RSA member or historian)

Create a class exhibition using quotes and images from *Voices from a Border War*

Key Themes from the Book

Jungle warfare and stealth operations

Psychological toll and physical exhaustion

Professionalism and mateship among ANZAC troops

Frustration with political invisibility of the campaign

Pride in contributing to a successful but unheralded operation

Key Inquiry Question

Why is the Borneo conflict less well known in New Zealand history?