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CAPTURED

Grades 7-12

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The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are listed below. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1, 8.1, 9-10.1, 11-12.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2, 8.2, 9-10.2, 11-12.2;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4, 9-10.4, 11-12.4;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7, 9-10.7, 11-12.7

**AN AMERICAN PRISONER OF
WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM**

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

- Communication, though forbidden by their captors, was essential in uniting the POWs while they remained in solitary confinement. They used a tap code to convey information and plans. Study the tap code grid on page 31 of *Captured*. Locate dialogue between prisoners in the book and translate it into tap code, writing the message in coordinate pairs. Example: (1,4), (3,4), (3,4), (4,2) would be the word “door.” Exchange your translated tap code with a partner to decode.
- Create a detailed storyboard for a tribute movie to honor those who served in the Vietnam War. Include images, maps, and narration that describe the lives of American soldiers serving in Vietnam as well as the politics that shaped the war. Incorporate information about the POWs in the Vietnam War, the creation of the POW-MIA movement, and the ways in which the soldiers were honored at home. Present your storyboard, or a film based on it, to your class.
- The way many Americans felt about our country’s involvement in the Vietnam War evolved over time. As the number of American troops involved in the conflict escalated, more and more Americans were killed and captured. The expanding medium of television vividly brought the horrors of war into every living room. Research how journalists, POWs, and veterans returning home from the war contributed to the complex and evolving perceptions Americans at home had about the Vietnam War. Synthesize your findings into an informative report.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The Introduction conveys a strong image of the prison cell of Commander Jeremiah “Jerry” Denton. What is your emotional response to Denton’s life in the cell? What descriptive elements helped to form your response?
- Describe the Domino Theory that shaped the actions of President Lyndon Johnson’s administration. What role did Operation Rolling Thunder play in the initial conflict in Vietnam?
- Describe what happened on July 18, 1965, as Jerry Denton and his bombardier-navigator Bill Tschudy embarked on a mission to bomb a key bridge that the North Vietnamese used to transport supplies to the Viet Cong.
- How did the Geneva Conference of 1954 organize post-colonial Vietnam? What was the United States’ role in altering the treaty?
- Denton and his fellow aviators had received training in SERE (survival, evasion, resistance, and escape) that had taught officers how to survive behind enemy lines or in captivity. This training was largely based on the rules established by the 1949 Geneva Convention related to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. What did

Denton expect as he entered the Hanoi Hilton? How did the reality of the prison camp differ from his expectations?

- Denton and his fellow prisoners were separated and forbidden from communicating with each other. Shortly after arriving at the Hanoi Hilton, Bob Shumaker, another prisoner at the camp, directed Denton to “go fishing.” What was Shumaker encouraging Denton to do? How did Denton use Shumaker’s idea to connect to other prisoners?
- Denton quickly realized that the band of prisoners at the camp needed a leader. What early life experiences helped to shape Denton into a strong leader?
- Denton insisted that his fellow prisoners follow the Code of Conduct. What was the Code of Conduct? Why do you think the POWs’ motto of “return with honor” was key to their survival?
- How did Denton cope with being separated from his wife and children? How did his captors soften the separation around Christmas?
- The North Vietnamese government sought to use the POWs as pawns in their propaganda campaigns. What did the captors force Denton and the other POWs to write and record? How did they convince the POWs to cooperate? How were these statements used by the North Vietnamese? How did Denton circumvent the goal of his televised interview for the North Vietnamese?
- The war in Vietnam dramatically shifted on July 6, 1966. What changed? Why did the North Vietnamese government decide to parade the prisoners through the streets of Hanoi?
- What was Little Vegas? How was the Code of Conduct, refashioned into the acronym BACK US, meant to support new arrivals at the POW camp?
- Who was Hanoi Hannah and how did her words impact the POWs as they learned of diminishing support for the Vietnam War in America?
- What was the Tet Offensive? How did it change the way the war was fought? What did that mean for Vietnam and for the US?
- Under great duress, Denton realized that sometimes leadership meant compromise. Cite examples when Denton and the other POWs had to submit to compromise in order to survive while they were in captivity.
- What role did the wives and families of soldiers play in creating the POW-MIA movement in America? Why did this movement start and what was its desired effect?
- What events led up to the release of the POWs? Describe their journey home to America. What did Jeremiah Denton go on to accomplish after his life as a POW in the Vietnam War?
- How do most Americans feel about the Vietnam War today? What role do the experiences of POWs—in captivity and in their repatriated public lives—play in shaping public opinion?

CAPTURED: An American Prisoner of War in North Vietnam

By Alvin Townley

Naval aviator Jeremiah Denton was shot down and captured in North Vietnam in 1965. As a POW, Jerry Denton led hundreds of his fellow American prisoners in withstanding gruesome conditions behind enemy lines. They developed a system of secret codes and covert communications to keep up their spirits and subvert their brutal captors. Later, Jerry would endure torture and long periods of solitary confinement. Through it all, he assured his fellow POWs that they would one day return home, with honor, together.

Although he spent seven and a half years as a POW, Jerry Denton led his men home in 1973 following the longest and harshest deployment in US history up to that time.



Suzanne Ashley

Alvin Townley has traveled the world to discover inspiring stories of leadership, adventure, and purpose. He is the author of the adult books *Legacy of Honor*, *Spirit of Adventure*, *Fly Navy*, and *Defiant*, and was part of the Emmy Award-winning team behind the documentary film *Jeremiah*. He speaks often, both to youth and adults, about subjects he holds dear, including veterans, character, perseverance, and citizenship. He lives in Atlanta with his wife.



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