



Maya Lin

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Constance Zack, of the School Library Association of Rhode Island, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Maya Lin*.

In a powerful exploration of art, politics, and creativity, the Oscar-winning film highlights the story behind the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC, one of the era's most controversial monuments. At age 21, Lin, an artist and architecture student, shot to global fame when her design was selected. Facing an onslaught of public attacks, she remained steadfast in her vision.

Contributors



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ADULT NON-FICTION

Brooks, Olivia. *Beyond the Wall: The Art and Legacy of Maya Lin*. Amazon Prime, 2025.

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, completed in 1982, redefined what a memorial could be, shifting the cultural conversation around war, memory, and healing. Brooks explores the life, work, and enduring influence of one of the most groundbreaking architects and artists of our time. This biography delves deep into Lin's creative evolution, beginning with her formative years as the daughter of Chinese immigrants, nurtured by a family of intellectuals and artists.

Byford, Mark. *A Name on a Wall: Two Men, Two Wars, Two Destinies*. Mainstream, 2013.

A true story that focuses on duty, heroism, and fate. We learn about the tragic loss of Larry Byford, a draftee rifleman in Vietnam, and the contrasting war story of the author's own father, Lawry Byford, a draftee from Yorkshire for whom the Second World War became the springboard for a new life filled with opportunities. Forty years after the final American combat troops left Vietnam, and thirty years after The Wall was built to heal a nation, this story asks: What lessons, if any, have been learned through the ultimate sacrifice of the name on a wall?

Doubek, Robert. *Creating the Vietnam Vets Memorial: The Inside Story*. McFarland, 2015.

While the memorial has enjoyed broad acceptance by the American public, its origins were both humble and contentious. A grassroots effort launched by veterans with no funds, the project was completed in three and a half years. An emotional debate about aesthetics and the interpretation of heroism, patriotism, and history nearly doomed the project. Written from an insider's perspective, this book tells the complete story of the memorial's creation amid Washington politics, a nationwide design competition, and heated controversy over the winning design and its creator.

Elmer, Jerry. *Felon for Peace: The Memoir of a Vietnam Era Draft Resister*. Vanderbilt, 2005.

When Jerry Elmer turned eighteen at the height of the Vietnam War, he publicly refused to register for the draft—a felony then and now. Later, he burglarized the offices of fourteen draft boards in three cities, destroying the files of men eligible for the draft. After working almost twenty years in the peace movement, he attended law school, where he was the only convicted felon in Harvard's class of 1990. This book is a blend of personal memoir, contemporary history, and political analysis that provides background for the controversies surrounding the war and its memorial.

Hass, Kristin Ann. *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. University of California Press, 1998.

This book explores how the memorial and the objects left at it reflect the ways Americans have struggled to come to terms with the Vietnam War and its impact on national identity and patriotism.

Palmer, Laura. *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam War Memorial*. Random House, 1988.

A collection of letters left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Includes the stories of those who wrote the letters.

Reston, James Jr. *A Rift in the Earth: Art, Memory, and the Fight for a Vietnam War Memorial*. Arcade Publishing, 2017.

A Rift in the Earth tells the remarkable story of the ferocious "art war" that raged between 1979 and 1984 over what kind of memorial should be built to honor the men and women who died in the Vietnam War. The story intertwines art, politics, historical memory, patriotism, racism, and a fascinating set of characters, from those who fought in the conflict and those who resisted it to politicians at the highest level.

Scruggs, Jan. *Why Vietnam Still Matters: The War and the Wall*. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, 1996.

While doing graduate school research on Vietnam veterans, Jan Scruggs had the idea to create a national memorial inscribed with the names of all Americans who gave their lives in the Vietnam War. In 1979, Scruggs began the project using \$2,800 of his own money. Despite controversy and numerous setbacks, over eight million dollars was raised, and many political hurdles were overcome. The memorial was built and dedicated in November 1982. Jan's story was made into an NBC Movie of the Week, which aired in May 1988.

Soffarelli, Michael. *Letters on the Wall: Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Smithsonian, 2006.

The son of a Vietnam War veteran combed through the archives searching for the most gripping letters and objects: a mother awaiting word of her missing son, a former comrade recounting a battle story, a pair of well-worn ballet slippers, and a collection of cigars. These items are not only a tribute to the fallen soldiers—they pay tribute as well to the families and friends who waited at home and the comrades who have never forgotten their brothers. They tell the story of a war that is still being fought by many who served and a conflict that changed the lives of many Americans forever. Preface by Maya Lin.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. *Echoes from the Wall: Teacher's Guide, History, Learning, and Leadership Through the Lens of the Vietnam War Era*. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, 1999.

Goes beyond the basic history of the era to provide high school students with materials and readings that help foster a global understanding of the Vietnam Era.

ADULT FICTION

Amos, James H. *The Memorial: A Novel of the Vietnam War*. Crown, 1989.

A thoughtful novel by a former Vietnam Marine whose grim memories of battle are evoked by a visit to the war memorial.

Marlantes, Karl. *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War*. Grove Press, 2011.

A timeless story of a young Marine lieutenant, Waino Mellas, and his comrades in Bravo Company, who are dropped into the mountain jungle of Vietnam as boys and forced to fight their way into manhood. Standing in their way are not merely the North Vietnamese but also monsoon rain and mud, leeches and tigers, disease and malnutrition. Almost as daunting are the obstacles they discover between each other: racial tension, competing ambitions, and duplicitous superior officers. But when the company finds itself surrounded and outnumbered by a massive enemy regiment, the Marines are thrust into the raw and all-consuming terror of combat. The experience will change them forever.

YOUNG ADULT NON-FICTION

Ferry, Joseph. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Remembering a Generation and a War*. Mason Crest, 2015.

Tells the story of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with background information about the causes and effects of the war in Vietnam, the development and creation of the Memorial, and the impact of the monument on veterans and others.

Lashnits, Tom. *Maya Lin*. Chelsea House, 2007.

Part of a series that covers cultural background, childhood, family, and work history. This book chronicles Lin's winning entry, as a young Yale student, in a competition to design the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., along with the history behind the competition and the controversy over her design.

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *Maya Lin: Thinking with Her Hands*. Chronicle Books, 2017.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is one of the most famous memorials in the world. But most people are not familiar with the young college student who won the design competition. This book chronicles Maya Lin's childhood, her battle to create the memorial as she envisioned it, and the incredible body of work she has produced since then. This compelling biography of a young woman who became a visionary artist and activist is also a timely celebration of the role of women and minorities in American society.

Sheinkin, Steve. *Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*. Roaring Brook Press, 2019.

Sheinkin tells the sweeping saga of the Vietnam War and the man who blew the whistle on the government's "secret war." From 1964 to 1971, Daniel Ellsberg went from nerdy analyst for the RAND Corporation to "the most dangerous man in America." Initially a supporter of Cold War politics and the Vietnam War, he became disenchanted with the war and the lies the presidents told to cover up the United States' deepening involvement. He helped to amass the Pentagon Papers—7,000 pages of documentary evidence of deception by four presidential administrations over twenty-three years—and then leaked them to the press, fueling public dissatisfaction with American foreign policy and the war.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Myers, Walter Dean. *Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam*. HarperCollins, 2002.

This book evokes the experiences of a young soldier as he searches the unfamiliar landscape, trying to sense the presence of the enemy in the jungle. But who is the enemy? The old man in the village? The babies? Planes pass overhead, dropping bombs "at a distance that is never distant enough." The author captures the young man's fear, uncertainty, and weariness. When the soldier does encounter an enemy as young as himself, neither fires. Close enough to see one another, they cannot kill.

Partridge, Elizabeth. *Boots on the Ground: America's War in Vietnam*. Viking, 2018.

Partridge explores the complex war from eight different perspectives: six American soldiers, one American military nurse, and one Vietnamese refugee. Each individual reveals a different facet of the war and moves us forward in time. Partridge also profiles key American leaders and events to remind us of all that was happening at home, and highlights veterans' struggles to acclimate to life after Vietnam.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Bunting, Eve. *The Wall*. Clarion, 1990.

A father and his young son have come to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to find the name of the grandfather the little boy never knew. They share the sadness as well as the pride of having Grandpa's name there.

Donnelly, Judy. *A Wall of Names: The Story of the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial*. Random House, 1991.

This book chronicles the complex history of the Vietnam War with a concentration on the construction of the Vietnam Memorial and what it means to many Americans.

Harvey, Jeanne Walker. *Maya Lin: Architect of Light and Lines*. Henry Holt, 2017.

Maya Lin was the daughter of two Chinese-immigrant artists, a potter and a poet, who never told Maya what to be or how to think. She went on to study architecture in college. During her senior year at Yale, Maya entered a national contest to design the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. She was inspired by the guideline that the design must blend with the park setting. Her conviction about her design, in the face of public backlash, shows her perseverance and firm belief in what she created.

Stone, Amy. *Maya Lin*. Raintree, 2003.

An overview of the life of the architect-sculptor who designed the Vietnam War Memorial, with photographs that display the beauty of her work.