Name:_____ Period:_____

Article of the Week – #3

I Spent Seven Years as a Vietnam P.O.W. by Congressman Sam Johnson

Directions:

1. **Read and annotate** the article with a minimum of 8 markings.
2. **Write a synonym** or simple definition above the bolded words found throughout the article.
3. Complete the comprehension questions.
4. Complete the **They Say / I Say** section by using the template provided on the back of the instructions sheet.

I Spent Seven Years as a Vietnam P.O.W.
Congressman Sam Johnson

Ask a veteran, and most will tell you they are not heroes. I share this **sentiment**. I do not feel like a hero, and I do not call myself one—I reserve that title for my fellow veterans who fought and paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. I reserve that title for my wife, Shirley, who held our family together while I was rotting in a cell in the Hanoi Hilton for nearly seven years during the Vietnam War. If not a hero, I am, however, a proud American veteran. I hold the deep conviction that our country should respect the service of all our faithful troops and veterans. Diminishing the courage and patriotism it takes to leave your family, face the enemy and even endure wartime torture has no place in a post-Vietnam America. I'm reminded of a phrase I will never forget that was etched on the prison wall by a fellow **captive** in Vietnam. It read, "Freedom has a taste to it to those who fight and almost die that the protected will never know."

That was a lesson I learned myself during the war in Vietnam. At the age of 20, when I was called to serve my country and defend freedom, I hadn't blinked an eye. I signed up to become a fighter pilot, even though I had never set foot on a plane—I thought it sounded exciting. In my 29 years in the Air Force, I flew 62 combat missions during the Korean War and 25 during the Vietnam War. It was on that fateful 25th mission over North Vietnam that my co-pilot Chesley and I were shot down.

The mission was simple: neutralize an enemy anti-aircraft gun and then eliminate a truck park they used for supply delivery with two loads of napalm. I had recently left the Air Force's precision demonstration flying team, the Thunder Birds, and Chesley and I were flying low over the trees doing 700 knots on the deck. When the enemy began firing at us from the ground, I switched to guns and squeezed the trigger. But nothing happened. The gun jammed.

Unfortunately, that was not out of the ordinary. The planes we were flying were really Navy aircraft designed for fleet defense. Due to consolidation at the Defense Department, the Air Force had been ordered to use them, too. Never mind that the planes had no bombing system for air-to-ground combat, which the Air Force needed for ground support, no gun and no sight system for bomb targeting and dogfighting. The planes the Pentagon fixed for us did have guns fitted to them, but the gun's success rate was about 50 percent.

That meant our plane was defenseless. Enemy shots caught our right engine on fire, and as the plane was going down, we ejected just before the aircraft crashed. In the midst of parachuting, my back and right arm broke and my left arm was severely injured. After landing, I struggled to get to higher **terrain** and, while trudging through the jungle, was quickly found by a flood of North Vietnamese soldiers, who eventually took me to Hoa Lo Prison, the infamous "Hanoi

Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read:

Johnson, By Rep. Sam. "I Spent Seven Years as a Vietnam POW." POLITICO Magazine. N.p., 21 July 2015. Web. 09 Sept. 2016.

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Hilton" where I would spend the next almost seven years of my life held captive by the Vietcong.

I was 35 years old, a husband and father of three small children. Forty-two of those months were spent in solitary confinement with 10 other fine American patriots because the Vietcong labeled us "diehard" resistors. And let me tell you, those years of physical and mental torture, away from my family, were hell.

I got through those hellish years by the grace and mercy of God, who provided me with a strong POW support system. That group included Naval aviators Jerry Denton and Jim Stockdale, the highest-ranking officer in the prison, who taught me the tap code on the prison walls so we could communicate to each other and other POWs. It kept our spirits up and saved our sanity. Jerry, Jim and I fought back against the North Vietnamese any way we could. As a result, our names were blacklisted together as hardcore resistors. Eventually we were moved to "Alcatraz," a special prison located in a courtyard behind the North Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense, along with eight other diehard POWs. It was there that we spent 42 months in solitary **confinement**, with our legs either shackled in cuffs or put in leg stocks at the bottom of our "beds"—little more than cement slabs.

In spite of these conditions, there were many instances that I will never forget of my fellow POWs demonstrating profound patriotism. In late spring of 1966, Jerry was severely tortured and was forced to make a public TV interview appearance. In defiance of his captors, he repeatedly blinked his eyes in Morse code during the interview, spelling out the word "T-O-R-T-U-R-E"—and thus confirming to U.S. intelligence for the first time that we were indeed being tortured. In April 1970, Jerry also personally ordered and led a camp hunger strike, which was successful in obtaining my release from solitary confinement. In the end, I was the last man to be released from solitary, after three and half years.

I said I got through those hellish years by the grace and mercy of God—and I mean that with the utmost sincerity. My POW years shaped my **perspective** on faith and service unlike any other experience in my life. I learned firsthand that the trying times do have a purpose and that we must choose to let them make us stronger. We must choose to keep a positive attitude. And sometimes we have to make that choice many times throughout the day.

The bottom line is: Every single faithful veteran—whether they are alive, no longer with us, a POW or **MIA**—deserves our utmost respect and support. With the help of God, I did my best to defy my captors, stand up for freedom and return with honor. I remain a proud American, and I will continue to defend and uphold all that has made this country the greatest country in the world. That includes defending my fellow service members and POWs and ensuring they receive the support they need—both when they serve and when they return safely home.

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STEP THREE: GRAMMAR

1. **The following sentence from the article uses SEVEN prepositional phrases. Underline all prepositional phrases that are used:**

   In defiance of his captors, he repeatedly blinked his eyes in Morse code during the interview, spelling out the word "T-O-R-T-U-R-E"—and thus confirming to U.S. intelligence for the first time that we were indeed being tortured.

2. **Create your own sentence using two prepositional phrases. UNDERLINE THE PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES:**

   _____

   _____

   _____

STEP FOUR: QUICK QUESTIONS (WRITE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS USING COMPLETE SENTENCES).

Question:_____

_____

Answer:_____

_____

Question:_____

_____

Answer:_____

_____

STEP FIVE: THEY SAY / I SAY ESSAY:

On the back of this sheet of paper, use the following template to write two well developed paragraphs. Fill in the blanks with your own concise word choice(s) using information from the article where needed. Using these sentences as a guideline, develop your own written response on the back.

The general argument made by (the author) in her/his work, _____, is that _____. More specifically, (the author) argues that _____. She/he writes, " _____." In this passage, (the author) is suggesting that _____. In conclusion, (the author's) belief is that _____.

In my view, (the author) is wrong/right, because _____. More specifically, I believe that _____. For example, _____. Although some might object that _____, I maintain that the issue of _____ is important because _____. Therefore, I conclude that _____.

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Using the template from the They Say / I Say section, write two paragraphs below. You may start your writing with "The general argument made by…"

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