



Global Voices Information Sheet

Child Soldiers

Facts on Child Soldiers

- Around the world, thousands of children under the age of 18 serve in government forces and armed rebel groups. Worldwide, there are an estimated 300,000 kids in 36 countries forcibly recruited into fighting forces.
- Not only do child soldiers participate in active fighting, they also have been known to transport weapons, lay landmines and work as sex slaves.
- The problem of child soldiers is most critical in Africa. But, they have also been used in Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East.
- Children are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own families or neighbours.

Key Terms

purity – the state of being unsullied by sin or moral wrong; lacking a knowledge of evil

rehabilitation – to restore to a condition of good health, ability to work, or the like

reintegration – the return to a well-adjusted functioning following mental illness

stigma – severe

Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

Introduction

This column presents the issue of rehabilitating child soldiers. Presenting hypothetical situations before reading the column may help students understand the complex points of view of both sets of victims – the communities who have experienced war and the child soldiers themselves.

Pre-Reading Questions:

Present the following scenario to partners or small groups. Ask each group to read their passage. Then, taking the perspective of the person in the story, brainstorm their reactions.

A small group of middle school students have been picking on a new student. They are bullying him and forcing him to throw rocks at classroom windows with the threat of beating him up if he doesn't comply. He is scared about getting caught doing something wrong but also afraid of what his classmates will do if he doesn't go along. He doesn't get caught the first time but is then asked by the same group to throw rocks at smaller kids. He does. One gets hurt, requiring stitches. The boy is sent home for two days.

- a) Describe the reactions from the following people:
 - The child who got hurt
 - The parents of the child who got hurt
 - Teachers and students whose classroom window got broken
 - Students who bullied the boy into participating
- b) How many victims are detailed in this story?
- c) In small groups, brainstorm follow-up plans for this boy's return to school (i.e., consider all the victims and what they need in order to move beyond the incident).

Alternative Pre-reading activity for older elementary students:

Scenario #1 You live in a country that has been plagued with civil war and unrest. Recently, members of a resistance army (sometimes called “guerrilla forces”) entered into your village killing and attacking innocent people. The resistance “soldiers” included one teenager you once knew as the small boy. You were attacked but managed to escape.

Months later you were able to return to your village and saw a ceremony taking place where a boy was being welcomed back to the community. You recognized him as your attacker. He is 13 years old.

What are you feeling, thinking and doing at this moment?

Scenario #2 While playing with friends one day, a rebel army called the Lord’s Resistance came through your school playground in a Ugandan village. They were holding machine guns and large dull knives called machetes. You were grabbed and taken into a truck. Your kidnapers forced you to witness attacks and eventually forced you to use a gun. At first you were terrified of what you saw and then horrified by what you were forced to do. Repeatedly you were beaten and intimidated until you begin to act like one of the other soldiers.

Months later, you escape. After wondering the countryside, you are found by a group of people who want to help you.

Now separated from the fighting forces, what are you feeling about your experience?

After months spent at their facility, the people from the center are returning you to your original home. As you near your village, you see groups of people watching and staring.

What are you thinking and feeling now?

Group follow up discussion:

- **Compare answers from both perspectives.**
- **Who are the victims?**

Post-Reading Questions:

1. What surprised you most about the column?
2. What is meant by “desensitizing?” (**Note:** If students need help, describe video games that are criticized as desensitizing youth to violence, particularly against women.)
3. If you could, what questions would you ask of a child at the Children of War centre?
4. Why are these children met with “suspicion and distrust” when they return to their villages?
5. Describe the strategies used by the Lord’s Resistance Army to recruit new members. What makes them so effective?
6. The column describes ceremonies of forgiveness. Why are these ceremonies held publically?

Extension/Enrichment Questions:

1. Most Canadians are fortunate not to have experienced the horrors described in the column. To help us try and relate, think about and respond to the following:
 - a) As a community, what are the difficulties with acceptance and forgiveness of people who have committed crimes?
 - b) Think back to the pre-reading activity, how would you react if you were asked to forgive the new student who threw the rock?
 - c) What would be needed to help that student feel welcomed into the school again?
 - d) What surprised you most about the rehabilitation and forgiveness process?

Research Extensions:

- What is meant by post-traumatic stress disorder? Use the internet or encyclopaedia to find out the physical and/or emotional symptoms.
- Find out more about the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda or other examples of children being used as soldiers (i.e., Sierra Leone).