



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 Secondary 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 one of the following scenarios to partners or small groups (**Note:** Try to have an equal number of groups per scenario). Ask each group to read their passage. Then, taking the perspective of the person in the story, brainstorm their reactions.

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?

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 kidnappers 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. Looking back to your reaction (in role) in pre-reading question one, has your opinion changed? If yes, in what way?
2. If you could, what questions would you ask of a child at the Children of War centre?
3. Why are these children met with “suspicion and distrust?”
4. Most Canadians are fortunate not to have experienced the horrors described in the column. To help us try and relate, think about the following:
 - a) Are there situations from our own school or community that can help us understand these feelings (i.e., dangerous/sexual offenders being released in communities or students returning from long-term suspensions due to violent acts)?
 - b) As a community, what are the difficulties with acceptance and forgiveness? Is this possible in our schools or our society?
 - c) Does the age of the offender make a difference? If yes, in what way? (**Note:** It will be interesting to see if students make a connection to the young offender laws where names are protected.)
5. Describe the strategies used by the Lord’s Resistance Army to recruit new members. What makes them so effective?
6. What is meant by post-traumatic stress disorder? Use the internet or encyclopaedia to find out the physical and/or emotional symptoms.
7. The column describes ceremonies of forgiveness. Why are these ceremonies held publically? Think about the long-term effects on the former soldiers and community.
8. In Canada, there are different practices open to people who wish to re-enter their communities after committing a crime or wrong-doing. In the Catholic religion, for example, confession offers an opportunity for absolution and forgiveness. Depending on the crime, our judicial system offers opportunities for retribution through community service. How do you react to these types of public forgiveness ceremonies offered to the children in the column? What are the advantages or disadvantages?

Extension/Debate:

Omar Khadr is the only Canadian left in Guantanamo Bay under suspicions of terrorism and charged with murdering an American soldier. He was imprisoned at the age of 15 and has remained there for over 5 years. At this point, the prison is being shut down and his lawyers are trying to get him transferred to Canada.

- Many people refer to him as a former child soldier and believe he should never have been imprisoned. Do you agree?
- Why do you think that the Canadian government is resisting his return?
- Do you think that he could be accepted once again in a Canadian community? Why/why not?
- What would you ask him if you could?

To follow up with Omar Khadr's case visit Amnesty Canada at:

http://www.amnesty.ca/resource_centre/news/view.php?load=arcview&article=3966&c=Resource+Centre+News