

Parallels of Children in War and Conflict: Yesterday and Today

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Rationale

When I step back and look at all three of my classes, I see the similarities and differences between all of my classes. Though my honors students excel in the academic area, many are immature and appear sheltered, almost as though they depend on their parents too much. My low performing students, who struggle in the area of academics, often have more “street smarts,” they would be able to feed themselves and take care of themselves if presented with no other choice. The one thing that all of my students have in common is an ego-centric mind. They are the center of their own world and sometimes fail to realize what is going on around them.

Everyday, I give my students a current event, rewritten on the white board with spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Not only does this exercise give students the opportunity to improve their grammar and mechanics skills (and hopefully their writing ability), but it also exposes them to news and events from around the globe. There are many days where I hear things like, “Really, that happens?” or “That’s how it is there?” Sometimes our discussions about what happens in other countries become lengthy because the kids are so interested about what goes on in other areas of the world. Most of my students know where they live, the people they associate with, and their daily lives. Unfortunately, for many of my students, that only includes their neighborhood.

Another issue that I face with my students is conflict; however, we usually refer to it as drama. Students in eighth grade seem to thrive on conflict. Physical fights, verbal disagreements with teachers, parents, and friends, rivalries, bullying – you name it and eighth grade teachers see it everyday. What is ironic is the fact that students don’t understand conflict; they have a difficult time identifying conflict and distinguishing between external and internal conflict.

I believe that students need to be exposed to different conflicts that have occurred and are occurring around the globe in order to make them aware of their world and to make them more appreciative of what they have. My students, like some of those children we will study, are innocent. They have not had to endure some of the hardships that other children their age are forced to experience. In order to understand these hardships, they must be shown through the children’s eyes . . . through the eyes of those who have experienced it. When students are asked to think about others and what it would be like to “walk” in their shoes, a sense of sympathy and understanding often results. My students should learn that even though we think we have it bad sometimes, it could always be worse. Even though my classes are at different academic levels, I feel that all

students deserve the opportunity to learn and to be challenged, which is why I have chosen to implement my curriculum unit with all of my classes.

In creating this unit, I want to expose my students to past and present conflicts of the world including the Vietnam War, the Holocaust, the Rwandan conflict and the child soldiers of Africa, and gang violence. I plan on using a variety of methods to reach my students and encompass all areas of language arts: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. It is important to expose my students to images of these conflicts to spark interest, inquiry, and discussion before providing any background information.

"A picture is worth a thousand words" always rings true with middle school students. Images produce reactions. I want my students to have questions and make faces of disgust . . . this tells me they are affected! This tells me that I have their attention, their curiosity, their inquisition. I hope to provide enough background information, as well as historical and social context to the students so that they have an understanding of the conflict and who it affects. Each conflict will teach a different lesson. I expect the students to have questions that I can't answer, because there are questions that can't be answered directly. My students should be able to recognize the similarities and differences that exist between themselves and the children we will study.

Ultimately, my goal is for students to see and understand the role that children play in conflict and to understand how children are affected directly and indirectly by conflicts including the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the Rwandan conflict and child soldiers in Africa, and gang violence. I want my students to understand that conflict is not always "I'm grounded because I didn't clean my room" or "Let's fight because you made fun of my shoes." I want students to know that a much deeper level of conflict exists around the world that affects people their age in ways unimaginable to us. Presenting the students with questions like, "Could you kill your little brother or sister if it meant you could save yourself? Or "Would you be able to walk barefoot in the snow for miles and miles if it meant your life?" will open the eyes of many of my students. Hopefully, they will begin to understand the hardships that others their age have had to face. They will realize that conflicts like dropping the book bag to fight over a girl or throwing a fit at your mother because she said no when you wanted to go to the mall is petty and not worth it, when things could always be so much worse. Conflict can happen at any time to anyone. Another goal of this unit is for my students to see the parallels between themselves and other children and teens from different time periods. When students can begin putting themselves in the shoes of others, I will know that I have done my job.

Demographics

I am an educator in one of the largest urban school districts in the United States. The student population is diverse and includes 42% African American, 36% Caucasian, 14 % Hispanic, and 4% Native American or multiracial students. Nearly 70% of the schools

are considered high-need with 30-99 percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and 65% of the schools have shown difficulty in meeting adequate yearly progress for academic targetsⁱ. In the 2007-2008 school year, the middle school where I teach met 29 of 29 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, was categorized by the North Carolina ABC program as a School of Progress achieving 62.1% proficiency, and showed average growth of 82.2%. The amount of growth for students in the lowest achieving group was 82% which indicated that the school is working closer towards its goal of closing the achievement gapⁱⁱ.

The school where I teach includes sixth through eighth grade. There are a total of 1,078 students, 70 teachers, 2 Assistant Principals, 3 counselors, 1 social worker and 39 support staff. The demographics of the student population are as follows: 65.4% of the students are African American, 17.4% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 3.4% Asian, and 3.7% are other which includes multi-racial or American Indian. The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch is 66.2%. In the eighth grade, which is the grade level in which I teach, there are 46 students who are of limited English proficiency (LEP), 47 students with disabilities (SWD), and 25 who are considered giftedⁱⁱⁱ.

I teach three double blocked (90 minutes) language arts classes a day. The academic and developmental abilities of the students in each class vary greatly. My first class is considered an honors class. Students placed in this class were either in an honors language arts class the previous year or scored a level four on a cumulative state test that is given at the end of seventh grade, indicating mastery in many of the language arts concepts and skills. I have a total of 26 students in the class. There are eleven boys and fifteen girls. The demographics of the class include 7 African-Americans, 13 Caucasians, 4 Hispanics, and 2 Multi-Racial students. Eight of the students are academically or intellectually gifted and perform at higher levels of accomplishment compared to their peers. One student was placed in this class because he has proven to be such a behavior problem in other classes and administration felt that if they took away the "audience" and place him with higher-performing students, then he too may grow. This has yet to be seen. The majority of students in my honors class are highly motivated. They enjoy being challenged. To create rigor in the classroom, I often have to go above and beyond the eighth grade curriculum. The honors class moves at a faster pace and the students receive less direct instruction and guided practice than some of the lower performing classes. My honors students often serve as my guinea pigs. It is the class where I take risks implementing new ideas and activities. If it works well and the students get something from it, I use it my other classes, usually with some modifications. If it fails miserably, I know that I either have to revamp the whole idea or activity or just scrap it completely.

My second class is made up of 22 students: 14 boys and 8 girls. There are 13 African-Americans, 2 Asians, 2 Hispanics, and 5 Caucasians. The students in this class scored at a level 2 or 3 on the seventh grade cumulative standardized test, indicating proficiency in

some of the language arts skills and concepts. Many of these students also had average or below-average grades in their seventh grade language arts class.

My third and final class of the day is my inclusion group. There are 28 students: 18 boys and 10 girls. The demographics of this class seem somewhat disproportionate to my other class with 21 African-Americans, 4 Caucasians, 2 Hispanics, and 1 Multi-Racial student. Six of the students are labeled as Exceptional Children (EC) because of learning disabilities. The other students in the class scored at a level 1 or 2 on the seventh grade cumulative standardized test and who performed poorly in their seventh grade language arts class. Because of budget cuts, the EC teacher only serves the six EC children for the last 45 minutes of class; however, she does modify assignments as she sees fit.

In the lower performing classes, I tend to have many students who come from single family homes or homes where one or both of the parents work. Many of these students are latchkey kids, who must go home, care for themselves and sometimes care for younger siblings. There is a high instance of inappropriate student behaviors and student absences. I sometimes attribute this to the amount of time students spend without adequate parental supervision. Students in these classes, especially my inclusion class, are performing well below where they should be for their age academically. To combat all of the challenges that these students present, I attempt to provide lessons and activities that will not only interest them, but that will force them to use higher order thinking skills in both reading and writing. Many of the students in these classes are capable of performing at above grade level, but fail to apply themselves, while there are others who truly struggle with simple concepts and conventions such as reading and writing and who need remediation in order to succeed.

Student Activity One

To begin the curriculum unit, students will be given a 25 question ethics survey. The ethics survey will contain questions that must make students think hard about their morals and values. Students will not be asked to put their name on the survey, nor will they be forced to participate in discussion. As a group, with the teacher as the facilitator, students will discuss their perspectives on some of the questions posed in the survey. This will allow them to express their opinions and develop a supported argument. I will pose different situations to some of the questions. One of the survey questions asks, "Is murder ever justified?" Most of the students will probably say "no"; however, when I change the question to "What kind of punishment would you want for someone who killed your mother?" the tune changes quickly and students now think that the death penalty is deserved, which is contradictory to their original beliefs. Another question asks, "Would you be willing to help someone who was in danger?" Many of the students say "Yes," but when I add to the question by saying, "What if your helping them put you into danger," the response quickly changes to "It might depend on who it was or maybe I'd just call 911." During the unit when students are being exposed to different conflicts,

I will revert back to the survey and ask many of the same questions to show them how their opinions and perspectives can change.

Student Activity Two

Using a white board or overhead projector, I plan to create a graphic organizer (See Figure 1) that includes eight rows. The first four rows will include each conflict that is being discussed in class: the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the Rwandan Conflict and child soldiers in Africa, and gangs. The last four rows will list the different roles in conflict: perpetrator, victim, bystander, and hero. Students will be given post-it notes. Each student will write what they know about each conflict (if anything) and the roles of the people involved in conflict, as well as what they want to know about each conflict and the roles of those involved. The column that asks students what they've learned will be left blank. This will enable me to see if any prior knowledge exists about The Vietnam War, the Holocaust, the Rwandan conflict and child soldiers in Africa, and gangs. It will also allow me to see where the students' interests lie and it gives students the opportunity for movement in the classroom.

Figure 1

	What I already know.	What I want to know.	What I learned.
The Holocaust			
The Vietnam War			
Rwandan Conflict and Child Soldiers in Africa			
Gangs			
Perpetrators			
Victims			
Bystanders			
Heroes			

Student Activity Three

Students are going to be shown a series of 10 to 12 pictures depicting children from the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the Rwandan conflict and child soldiers in Africa, and of children who are responsible for or victims of gang violence. Students will not be told who the pictures are of, what happened to those depicted in the pictures or when the photos were taken. Working in small groups, students will attempt to categorize the photos. Some may do this chronologically and some may do it by the emotion shown on the faces of the children in the photo. There will be no wrong way to do it. Each student

will have to present the organization of the photographs to the class. Once all of the students have had an opportunity to present the organization of the photographs, I will give a brief explanation of what each photograph is about. Students will then be expected to organize the photographs once again; however, the organization of the photographs must display a visual. Students will explain their second scheme of organization to the class. The goal of this activity is to visually introduce students to different conflicts. They will see children their age or the same age as some of their siblings which may allow them to better connect to and understand the conflicts and strife that can exist.

Student Activity Four - This activity will include all of the conflicts: the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the Rwandan conflict and child soldiers in Africa, and gang conflict. Students will learn about each conflict and complete different tasks associated with each conflict. This activity will most likely take a month to complete, depending on how much time is devoted to each conflict and the activities associated with it. The goal of activity four is for students to not only learn about the conflicts, but to see these conflicts through the eyes of the children who must endure them. Though my students may not have had to bear some of the hardships of the children in the conflicts we will study, they have had hardships and they are real. Allowing students to make connections to others can help them to better understand the conflict and can help increase their ability to resolve conflict in their own lives.

The Holocaust

During the beginning stages of this lesson, students will not be made aware that they are learning about the Holocaust. Instead, I like to lead into it by allowing the students to reveal things about themselves through their thoughts and personal opinions.

We begin by exploring racism, prejudice, and stereotypes. Students will be given a list of common stereotypes: Men as hairdressers, Asians as nail technicians, blondes as stupid, etc. Students will be asked to write what they think of each stereotype. Every time I have ever conducted this activity, students begin laughing at certain stereotypes and show their agreement to many of them. This activity often allows the students to see that they, too, can be prejudice and believe the notion of common stereotypes. I also show a brief video clip of an experiment that was conducted by a teacher in her classroom with brown and blue eyed students. I ask my kids to write how they would feel if they were singled out because of something they couldn't control. More often than not, my students exclaim how angry they would be. I regularly refer back to this activity and the video clip throughout the lessons on the Holocaust, especially when students say things like, "How could anyone do that to another person [victims of the Holocaust]?" I remind them of some their answers to the stereotype questions and point out how the Germans were similar in their views of the Jewish people, which makes the students think twice.

Following the stereotype activity, I read aloud the story “The Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust^{iv}”; however, the Holocaust part of the title is left out. After this story, I like to pose questions like, “Could the taking of the animals have been prevented?”; “What in history is similar to this situation?” and “Can things like this still happen?” In the past, most students will say that the allegory is similar to the Holocaust; however, many will also say that nothing like the Holocaust is currently going on in our world today. Next, I have students read the story of Kitty Genovese^v. Though it is from 1964, it puts a modern spin on how something terrible can happen to someone, but no one is willing to help. I will also briefly bring up the instances of genocide that are currently going on across the world, such as in Darfur.

Next, I begin providing background information about the Holocaust. Because of time constraints, it is important to focus on how and why Hitler came to power, why the Jews and other groups of people were targeted, and what actually occurred during the Holocaust. Students will be given different “What would you do?” scenarios where they are the victim, the supposed aggressor, or an innocent bystander. For example: A student calls her friend to go to the movies. There is no answer. She goes to her friend’s house and finds the door open and people removing the furniture. You find out that your friend’s house has been seized by the government because she is Jewish. These types of scenarios will enable the students to put themselves in the place of those being affected by the Holocaust.

Throughout the unit, photographs and other primary sources will be shown to the students to make the lesson and the events more tangible to the students. Some items to be shown may include transcripts, the Nuremberg Laws, identification cards, pictures of the ghettos and camps, and photographs of the people in the camps, to name a few. Students are usually shocked and disturbed by the events of the Holocaust. They question those responsible and the victims for not trying to escape. At this point in the lesson, I like for my students to read “You Will Do as Directed^{vi}” by Ron Jones. This story helps students to realize just how easy it is to fall prey to the hands of propaganda and peer pressure, even in today’s so-called ‘advanced’ society.

Throughout the lesson on the Holocaust, students will be reading and analyzing *Night*^{vii} by Elie Wiesel. This autobiography gives students insight into one child’s experience of the Holocaust. Along with the reading of *Night*, students will watch the Academy Award winning documentary, “One Survivor Remembers^{viii},” in which Gerda Weissmann, a Holocaust survivor, tells her story. The autobiography and the film will help to reinforce the horrors of the Holocaust.

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will be expected to research the life and experiences of a child in the Holocaust. They will present the information they find in the form of a narrative poem. I also want the students to write a reflection based on the assignment that explains the feelings the student had while researching the life of a child

who was forced to endure such horrid things. Finally, students will revisit the graphic organizer presented in Activity Two. The students will fill in what they learned about the Holocaust as well as what they learned about the roles of those involved.

The goal of all of the assignments within this lesson is for students to see that the children of the Holocaust were innocent and to recognize the flaws in human behavior that can lead to something as horrific as the Holocaust.

The Vietnam War

I am going to begin the lesson of the Vietnam War by introducing familiarity: a clip of the Vietnam War as shown in the film *Forrest Gump*^{ix}. Now that the students are engaged, I plan to show them a few of the photos from “Requiem for Vietnam^x”. I also want to show some of the photos that were taken by the United States that depict the war in a positive light. Students will have to determine if the photo type has a positive, negative, or neutral connotation and if bias exists. Because the Vietnam War was so controversial, not well supported and misunderstood, it is important for the students to understand the Vietnamese and American perspectives on why the war occurred and what the final outcome was. There are always two sides to every story.

Half of the class will be responsible for researching the experiences of a young soldier from the United States while the other half of the class will be responsible for researching the experiences of a young soldier from Vietnam. The students should focus on the soldier’s roles in the war and on the emotions they felt throughout the war. Once the research has been completed, the students will be asked to pair up – a student who researched a U.S. soldier will pair with a student who researched a Vietnam soldier and vice versa. Students will share their research findings with one another. Students should note the similarities and differences between the experiences of both soldiers while in war. Students will most likely see that the reasons why the soldiers are fighting are very different, as are some of their experiences during the war. It is my assumption that they will find that in lieu of the soldiers’ differences, many of the emotions they have before, during, and after war are very much the same. It is my hope that the students understand that one conflict from two different perspectives can produce similar emotions.

Next, I will provide additional information on the Vietnam War, particularly about children and how they were and are affected. Photographs can allow for any conflict to come to life. In Vietnam, photos were taken of children and adults before they were put to death. When students see these photographs of young children before they died, they may begin to realize how differences among people can tear families, countries, and friends apart. This is when I begin asking questions, “How do some of your differences affect the relationships you have with your friends, family, and teachers?” Students will willingly answer this question and then I will ask “Would you be willing to kill someone who is innocent because of the differences you have with them?” Students will say no, or

so I hope. It is now that I pose the question “How can a “normal” human being kill someone because of something as little as, you live on the Eastside of town and I live on the Westside?” This will enable students to have sympathy for the children in the photographs and to think twice about their actions towards others when a conflict arises.

When students think about war, they usually think that a person has to be there or at least alive to be affected. I want to prove to them that that is not necessarily the case. As a class, we will read "Stop the Sun"^{xi} by Gary Paulsen. This story shows how a father’s experience during the Vietnam War impacts his son life, long after the war is done.

Students will be given three options for reflection. Although I would like for the students to complete all three options, there may only be time for them to choose one. In the first option, students will be given three excerpts from The Unwanted^{xii} by Kien Nguyen: one where he is forced to abandon his cousin to survive, another when he must become the "man" of the house to ensure the survival of his family, and the third when he realizes he is not wanted because he has an American father and an Asian mother. Students must reflect on these experiences and determine how they would they handle each situation if they were Kien Nguyen. I also want students to think of similar situations in their own lives and how they deal with them. Many of my students come from large families where they may not feel wanted, many are left to play the "parent" to their siblings, and many have to make decisions for themselves that may upset others. This may allow them to make parallels between themselves and someone like Nguyen.

The second option is for students to read a letter^{xiii} written by a soldier from Vietnam to his family. Students will respond to the letter as though they were the original recipient. They will also write their personal reflection about the letter. Some prompting questions may include: What stood out?; what were the experiences of the soldier? and How was the soldier’s attitude toward the war?

In the third and final option, students will read information on Agent Orange and view photographs of its lingering effects. Students will take the perspective of the child affected and write how the war and the use of Agent Orange has affected them in their daily lives. I want them to address their reflection toward the country that they feel is responsible for their situation.

At the conclusion of the lesson, I want students to think about the Vietnam War – “Who was right?”, “Who was wrong”, “Who was affected?” and “Did anyone really win?” I also want the students to complete the “What I have Learned” column in the graphic organizer presented in Activity Two, along with what they learned about the roles of the people involved in regards to the Vietnam War.

The Rwandan Conflict and Child Soldiers in Africa

Students will be presented with photos of child soldiers from Rwanda, Uganda, and Sierra Leone. These photos will not show destruction or death; they will only show the children, some with their weapons. Students will be asked what their thoughts are on the photos - what emotions they see on these young people's faces, how old they think these children are, what they think their role is, and whether or not they would be fearful of people like this. It is my assumption that many of my students will say things like, "I wouldn't be scared of that kid." It is then when the photos of the destruction and death caused at the hands of child soldiers will be shown and explained.

Facts about the conflict in Rwanda and the use and role of child soldiers in Africa will be provided to students, along with information on how and why children become soldiers. The students will be asked to close their eyes as the teacher reads aloud some of the first-hand accounts of child soldiers^{xiv} and their experiences, as well as victims and their experiences. Students will be asked to reflect on what they have seen and heard in their notebooks with prompting questions such as "How did seeing some of those images and hearing those eyewitness accounts make you feel?" Each student will trace their foot and cut it out. On one side of the foot, students will be asked "Would you ever do something that you knew wasn't right to get the basic essentials for your family?"; "Would you do anything to survive?"; "If something ever happened to someone you loved, would you want to avenge their death?"; "Do you always have a choice?" and other similar questions. On the other side of the foot, I want students to answer those questions from the perspective of a child soldier. My hope is that answering these questions will allow the students to see that they are not very different from some of the child soldiers that we have just learned about. Child soldiers are still children, but when faced with certain circumstances, they can become different people.

Lastly, a PowerPoint presentation^{xv} created by Amnesty International will be shown which will reiterate the use and abuse of child soldiers, the rehabilitation process, and ways that we (the students and I) can help. Students will then be asked to write letters to Amnesty International to help end the use and abuse of children as soldiers. Lastly, the students will fill in the "What I have Learned" section of the graphic organizer about the Rwandan conflict and the role of child soldiers in Africa from Activity Two.

Children and Gangs

Gangs are a visible part of everyday life for a lot of my students. To begin this lesson, I want to explore what my students already know about gangs. This will allow me to determine if their perspectives toward gangs are positive or negative. To be completely honest, my goal of this lesson is to present gangs to my students in a way that will deter them from ever wanting to be a part of them. The information I provide to the students

will not be bias – it will be facts about gangs. Sometimes; however, when you provide the cold hard facts, you realize just how bad something is or can be.

I want the students to brainstorm all of the reasons that children join gangs. This brainstorm will be made visible to all of the students. My guess is that a lot of my students will brainstorm things like money, a sense of family, boredom, etc. Because we will have just finished the unit on child soldiers, I will ask my students to compare the reasons why children became child soldiers in Rwanda and other parts of the world with the brainstorm of why kids join gangs. Many students should be able to recognize that some child soldiers are child soldiers for many of the same reasons that some children and teenagers join gangs. Making this realization may make some of the students stop and think – *I know that child soldiers have caused death and destruction. Do gangs do the same thing??*

The next part of the lesson will include photographs of gang members and some of the things that have been caused by gang members: graffiti, injury, death, etc. as well as stories from gang members. I will also take excerpts from Monster: An Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member^{xvi} by Sanyika Shakur as well as Do or Die^{xvii} by Leon Bing. The excerpts that I choose will show negative aspects of gang life. For example, I may choose an excerpt from Monster that depicts Shakur being sprayed with bullets or his life in solitary confinement. I also want to read the Letters to Youth^{xviii} written by Tookie Williams while he was incarcerated. Students are familiar with the story of Tookie Williams, as his execution brought on quite a bit of media; however, I will provide background information just in case students do not know who he is. I think it is important to show students that there are people who join gangs and who do terrible things, but who choose to turn their lives around . . . like Tookie Williams who while in prison wrote children’s books that encouraged kids to stay away from gangs.

Although it would be difficult to arrange, I would love to have a former gang member come in and speak to the students, preferably someone whose life was extremely affected by a gang. Often times when a student hears something from the source, their ears perk up and they begin to listen. Hearing the stories of the horrors of gang life may keep some of my students away from that way of life.

After seeing the photos and hearing from gang members, I want students to attempt to answer the question “Why?” Why do people, in a society such as the one we live, choose to participate in activities that can harm themselves and others? Again, my assumption is that many of my students will say (especially those from economically disadvantaged families) money and street credit.

Using the chapter from Freakonomics^{xix} by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner entitled, “Why Do Drugs Dealers Still Live With Their Moms?,” I will help the students to explore gang hierarchy and the financial side of gangs, specifically the compensation

they receive for doing what they do. In this chapter, Levitt and Dubner describe a Chicago gang. This gang, like many others, has a hierarchy. Throughout the chapter, Levitt and Dubner describe the roles of each member of the gang, the risks, and the rewards. I think what students will find most interesting is that the “soldiers” of the gang, which are usually high in number, face the highest risk of being killed (1 in 4) and make less than \$3.00 an hour when all of the calculations are said and done. Because I’ve had many students in the past who were involved with gangs or whose aspirations were to join gangs, I have used this chapter in the past. And every time I do, the looks on the students’ faces begin to change. I start to hear things like “Joining a gang is whack.” Unfortunately, I have also had students who say things like “I’ll just work my way up.” I think that sometimes if you put something like life and financial security in perspective, especially in terms of gangs, the students will step back and realize that they are better than that.

As a closure to this lesson, I want students to create gang prevention posters that highlight the reasons why kids should stay away from gangs. I find that this lesson is particularly difficult to assess. I want my lesson on gang violence to be more about discussion and prevention than anything else because this is a conflict that hits close to home and should not be ignored. Like all of the other lessons in Activity Four, the students will go back to the graphic organizer presented in Activity Two and will complete it.

Student Activity Five

Students will research an actual child or teenager who was involved in the Vietnam War, the Holocaust, the Rwandan conflict, or gang violence, as either a victim or aggressor. I want the students to step into the shoes of the person they chose to research, “If I were [child from conflict], my life would be like . . .” This activity will help the students to better understand the conflict that they chose to focus on and the experiences of the child or teenager involved in the conflict. It may also allow them to better grasp the conflicts that exist in their own lives and the ways that they deal with them.

Student Activity Six

One of the last components of the curriculum unit will include the same 25-question ethics survey that was given at the start of the unit. The post survey and discussion will show how the students’ perspectives may have changed after learning about the different conflicts and to show how knowledge and education can change one’s perspective.

Student Activity Seven

At the end of the curriculum unit, students will revisit their completed graphic organizer that was presented at the beginning of the unit. I will ask the students to discuss the

similarities and differences between the four conflicts that we studied; however, I particularly want to focus on the student responses to who they thought filled the perpetrator, victim, bystander, and hero roles in each conflict. Discussing these roles and how the students view each of the roles will allow them to see the differences of opinion amongst themselves and their classmates. It is at this point that I will pose the question, “How can one’s perspective have an impact on war and conflict?” I hope that what the students have learned throughout the curriculum unit will help them to answer this question and to recognize that a person’s perspective is crucial in creating and ending conflict. Students need to know that conflicts are preventable across the world and in their own lives.

Conclusion

It is important for our students to be exposed to different events that occur in the United States of America and other countries. If our students, just like adults, don’t know about something, they cannot make informed opinions, which may cause them to be ignorant towards certain people, events, situations, and circumstances. It is also imperative that our students understand that the people involved in and affected by these conflicts are not just adults. They are children too. Showing my students conflict from a child’s perspective may have had more of an impact on them. When teachers teach, it is rarely relative to the students – it occurred long before they were born, it deals with government and officials and other adults, it’s so far away, and it’s just something the kids can’t grasp. But when the students see how it affects or has affected someone their age, they take notice and when students take notice, they better understand the material. It is important for my students to recognize their mistakes and to learn from their own mistakes and the mistakes of others. I believe that this unit can bring us a step closer to achieving this goal.

Bibliography for Teachers

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008.

Through first-person narrative, Beah describes his life from a carefree, hip hop-loving 12-year-old through years of horror to a final escape from Sierra Leone four years later. As the government forces and the rebel army struggled for dominance, Sierra Leone civilians suffered the most frightful toll: looting, raping, burning, maiming, torturing, and execution.

"Child Soldier's Photo Exhibit." <http://www.amnestyusa.org/children/child-soldiers/photoexhibit/page.do?id=1181009> (accessed October 17, 2009).

This PowerPoint presentation is designed to promote the passage of the Child Soldier Prevention Act and includes information about conflict, child soldiers, and the rehabilitation of child soldiers.

"Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers." <http://www.child-soldiers.org> (accessed October 17, 2009).

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Notes

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