

Case Studies of Children and War: Defining, Discovering and Developing Heroes

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Introduction

It is the quintessential writing assignment for most American school children... “Write a one page paper describing your hero.” Perhaps the most common responses include a brief biography of a child’s mother, or the story of a comic book character that saves lives or possibly a big brother who won a first place trophy. When I was given this assignment in 6th grade I chose to write about a friend of my mother’s who was battling breast cancer. I wrote about her because I felt sad for all of the pain she was in but admired the courage she had shown throughout her illness. I selected my hero based on an emotional response and not any specific criteria I had developed...after all, I was ten years old.

For most children a hero is someone whom they like or even admire, but for most the definition of a hero is ambiguous. I recently asked my students to name their personal hero and a vast majority of students responded with a celebrity or a close friend or relative. When I asked the students to explain why they selected the individual they did, most explained that they simply thought of their hero as someone who had inspired them to be “better” or “greater.” A few of my students produced stories of single mothers who have persevered or hip-hop moguls who have turned humble beginnings into financial success. Whatever the response, all of my students lacked a definition of heroism with which to measure their heroes. They were able to point out attributes that embody heroism, but were far less able to characterize heroism with a clear, cohesive archetype.

The goal for my unit is to enable students to define heroism for themselves and then be able to embody those attributes through their own actions. Specifically, I want students to develop a criterion for heroism, and then study children in conflict to find individuals who meet their criterion. Through the process of defining heroism and finding heroes who have emerged in times of conflict, students will be empowered to perform their own, meaningful acts of heroism. I designed the unit with my specific students in mind, but have also attempted to make the curriculum broad enough that it can be used in multiple secondary classes with students of diverse backgrounds and abilities. I also designed my unit as a series of historical case studies that can be woven into various units throughout my World History course. However, these case studies could also be taught in one cohesive, thematic unit or again, woven into a chronological curriculum at various intervals throughout the year.

Presently, I teach high school history at a performing arts high school with a very unique population. My high school is a magnet school wherein admission is granted after a very loose and informal audition process. Admission priority is given to students who live in close proximity to the school, which is a low-income, urban neighborhood. The second wave of students admitted is essentially students from surrounding suburbs and of more affluent backgrounds. Such a diverse population of students lends itself to a diverse range of interest in the arts, from very little to complete dedication. Moreover, our students come from backgrounds that span the gamut with respect to their position on higher education, their interest in history and their involvement with humanitarian causes. Such a unique student population poses many challenges; however the unique composition of my school's student body has served as good foundation for creating a unit transferable to many classrooms.

Objectives

My unit is structured into five layers. The unit begins with students applying prior knowledge to create their own definition of heroism. Next, students will begin to acquire general, content knowledge about past and present conflicts. Subsequently, students will look at the roles of adolescents and their peers in these conflicts. Then, students will be required to research and find heroes who emerged during these conflicts by applying their definition of heroism. Finally, students will need to find specific actionable steps to embody their definition of heroism for a present-day, social injustice. All five components of the unit are designed to ultimately empower students to become social activists through learning about adolescents in conflicts and embodying heroism.

The first step of the unit requires students to create their own definition and criterion for a hero. With my students in mind, I would anticipate their criterion to be constructed as a list of characteristics that a hero would possess. It's fair to assume that most of these characteristics would be one-dimensional and most likely the antithesis of a stereotypical villain. In order to illicit more complex responses from students, I have created a list of potential guiding questions that will require analysis and reflection:

1. Are heroes made or born?
2. What are some of the typical actions of a hero?
3. What motivates a hero?
4. Must one know hardship in order to become a hero?
5. When is the presence of a hero necessary, if ever?
6. When do heroes emerge? Why?
7. Can one simultaneously be heroic and villainous?

With these six questions as a starting point, students should be able to construct an initial definition of heroism, which will more than likely change as the unit progresses.

The questions are specific enough to force students to construct an archetype yet broad enough to allow students to transfer their definition from one case study to another.

Following the creation of a definition, students will examine historical case studies of conflicts in various regions of the world. I have selected a total of five conflicts within Europe, Africa and Asia as the basis for the unit. The cases studies are from diverse regions and time periods to further allow the unit to be woven throughout a course and to also offer numerous opportunities for students to engage and develop a genuine understanding of the historical content. The case studies will build off of one another to give students a foundational, historical understanding of each event as well as a thematic understanding. Diverse case studies will enable students to note themes found throughout various conflicts and more cohesively transpose their definition from case to case.

I feel that looking at each case study from a purely scholarly perspective could make the material potentially intangible for students; however, using child narratives from conflicts can place students in the shoes of their peers. I have elected to narrow the scope of how each case study will be examined by highlighting the experiences of adolescents within each conflict. Students will examine the experiences of adolescents, potentially as perpetrators, witnesses, bystanders and heroes in each case. I want students to view conflict through the experiences of adolescents to give each conflict more contextual relevance. Additionally, the case studies, when examined through the experiences of adolescents, will serve to develop a student's sense of empathy. I think the case studies, when seen through the eyes of children, will have the most potential to illustrate how an activist can alter the course of an event and how the complacent allows events to be shaped for them.

The case studies will require students to examine the different causes, effects, opponents and proponents of children in numerous global conflicts, which will help students analyze acts of violence both in the past and present. Most of the voices of adolescents in the case studies will be from child soldiers and other persons relatable to a student's world. Specifically, the unit examines the social, economic and political climate in which children as soldiers has become acceptable in various points throughout history. Since the experiences of child soldiers often clouds the dichotomy of hero and villain, these experiences will further require students examine tier definition of a hero. Collectively, the aims of examining children in the case studies are to develop students' understanding of the long-term ramifications of children's participation in conflict, clarify their archetype of a hero and to foster a shift in consciousness among students.

After examining each case study through the child's eye, students will then use their previously developed criterion to find a hero who emerged within the conflict. This portion of the curriculum requires students to be proactive to develop a deeper understanding of the conflict by conducting their own research. Once students have been

provided with the basic foundational knowledge, it will be their responsibility to seek out an influential “hero” from the conflict. Their selected hero may be an adult or child, a victim or survivor, but whoever the hero, they must meet the archetype the student previously developed. Students will not only need to research and identify their hero, and they will also have to defend the actions of their hero as it meets their archetype.

Rationale

All of the above layers of the curriculum culminate in compelling students to act against social injustice. I see all of the case studies as an opportunity to shake our students from the comfort of our classrooms and begin to experience history as the relevant and dynamic force it is. Since we, as educators, cannot offer our students the opportunity to witness first-hand the ramifications of children in conflict, I think it is essential that we offer our students an experience that will provoke their sense of humanity and provide the tools to be socially active.

The final product for the curriculum unit will entail students fulfilling their definition of a hero through their own acts of social activism as it relates to a current conflict. They may select a conflict that was addressed in the curriculum or more likely, they can opt to respond to a conflict that they have selected based on their own interests. In order to make my aim of social activism possible, the curriculum unit will include current resources and links to international, humanitarian organizations that seek to stop various conflicts presently. The historical knowledge, coupled with access to resources to promote social change will make social activism both meaningful and accessible for students.

Social activism is the ultimate aim because I feel that it has the greatest potential, more than any other vehicle, to transform and enrich the lives of our students and ourselves. Activism improves the lives of both actor and recipient and my hope is that the curriculum unit will foster an informed and meaningful experience for both student and teacher. Throughout the unit there are multiple opportunities for students and teacher to engage in difficult conversations and build solutions for actively opposing social and political injustices. Just as I want my students to reject complacency and pursue justice, the curriculum unit should serve to inform and inspire the educator.

Case Studies Overview

As I stated earlier, the proceeding five case studies can be taught in one cohesive, thematic unit or woven into a chronological curriculum at various intervals throughout the year. These specific case studies were selected for several reasons. Primarily, they were selected because they are historical events that have consistently captured the

attention of my students. Each case has proven, in my experience, to be relatable and powerful for students. The events are also common for most World History curricula and therefore, will be relevant for most teachers. In short, the five case studies collectively provide historical context *and* an opportunity for activism. Finally, the experiences of adolescents in these case studies are both accessible and relevant, in some capacity, for a majority of students.

The first case study is an exploration of the use of child soldiers and the experience of child victims during World War II in Nazi Germany. Next is an examination of the experiences of children during the Vietnam-American War. Thirdly we will look at the historical causes and present ramifications of the children affected by the conflict in Rwanda. Moving into a more contemporary conflict, the unit will address the historical and current role of children in Burma. Finally, we will examine the present circumstances of child soldiers and children caught in the crossfire of conflict in Uganda, Africa. The examination of the aforementioned case studies will require students to ask the question of who has the power to prevent such grave injustices.

A significant portion of the information I have included for the contemporary case studies was taken from publications by Human Rights Watch, a non-profit, international human rights organizations. I chose to use information published by this organization because it is a highly reputable, humanitarian organization that makes recommendations for activism to the international community as well as gives voices to those involved in conflicts. A vast majority of their research is produced from interviews conducted with civilians involved in conflict. Furthermore, the website for Human Rights offers numerous primary and secondary resources and would be an accessible way for students to stay informed and become socially active.

Germany

The first case study is an examination of World War II, specifically highlighting the experiences of child soldiers that served in WWII and those children who were victims and survivors of the Holocaust. World War II is perhaps one of the most extensively studied topics in World History and for this reason I have decided to provide less historical background and more information about the experiences of adolescents during WWII in this particular case study. I think most educators would agree that World War II has always been a source of fascination for most students primarily because they are fascinated with Adolf Hitler, whom they view as the sole creator of such as massacre. Year after year, students in my World History classes ask about Hitler... “Was he really half Jew?” or a vegetarian or “Did he drink his own urine?” or pray for hours on end or “Was his mother a prostitute?” and on and on. Their inquisitive nature about the face of the Holocaust shows their genuine engagement with the topic but also shows their separation from the millions of others who experienced the horrors of Nazi Germany. The

purpose of the case study about Nazi Germany is to clarify and humanize the experiences of children during the war.

From my experience teaching about World War II, I have found that many students have taken little time to consider those who perpetrated crimes in Nazi Germany other than Adolf Hitler and have also little familiarity with individuals who worked to stop the genocide. Through examining child soldiers and child victims of World War II in Nazi Germany, I hope to expand their understanding of who contributed to the genocide and how such a crime was ever executed. Numerous accounts and various primary sources from children during WWII are incorporated into my unit to make the material influential and tangible. Texts that feature accounts from Hitler Youth and texts that recall experiences of children in concentration camps are of particular relevance given the goals of this unit. I have selected sources that will illustrate the complexity of children's involvement in the conflict and make the experience of children in war relatable.

I have selected to show diverse perspectives of the experiences of adolescents during WWII as illustrated through comparing the role of child soldiers in the Hitler Jugend, Hitler Youth, with the life of a persecuted Jewish child. During World War II, the Nazi party developed several factions of youth organizations to extend the party ideology into younger generations. The youth organizations capitalized on the enthusiasm of German youth and provided a sense of community for both boys and girls. German girls who were able to perform a number of physical tests, such as marching for two hours, swimming for 100 meters and making a bed, were eligible to join the Bund Deutscher Mädel, League of German Girls.¹ The goal of the BDM was to prepare German girls for complete allegiance to the Nazi state and motherhood. Some of the common responsibilities held by the BDM girls were watching after young children, provide refreshments for troops leaving for battle and care for wounded soldiers.² While German girls were being trained on how to raise and care for the ideal Aryan family, German boys were being prepared to serve the military.

The Hitler Youth came about in Nazi Germany as a way to indoctrinate German, Aryan children, ages 14-18, into the Nazi party and prepare them for military service by providing them with quasi-military training. After a slow, but continual incline in popularity, many youths eagerly joined the Hitler Youth for the pageantry, camaraderie and an opportunity to play a role in the increasingly powerful Nazi Germany.³ Activities of the Hitler Youth were initially centered on developing physical strength and athleticism. According to Hitler, "...the German boy of the future must be slim and slender, as fast as a greyhound, tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel."⁴ Therefore the activities of the Hitler Youth focused increasingly on physical training as opposed to any education outside of party ideology and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Part of the allure for young boys was the action that the Hitler Youth offered. Young boys were trained to fire rifles, read maps, drive motorcycles, march in parades and in some cases, they learned to sail. However, as popularity of Hitler Youth and the power of the Nazi party grew, many

youths were also coerced or forced into joining. By 1939, roughly 8 million youths were enrolled in Nazi youth organizations, and those who were not, were accused of being criminals. According to a law issued in 1939, youths who did not enroll in Hitler Youth were threatened to be forcibly removed from their homes and placed in state run orphanages.⁵

The boys of Hitler Youth were not expected to serve in actual combat until they had reached maturity; however, as Germany's military approached defeat near the end of WWII, many boys were sent to the front lines to defend Germany against the Red Army. In one battle in 1945, some 5,000 Hitler Youth were sent to the Russian front wearing over-sized uniforms and helmets, carrying large rifles. Of this group, an estimated 4,500 were killed within five days of battle. Many of Hitler Youth who were not killed in battle, either committed suicide or were executed by SS troops looking for deserters.⁶

At the same time that Hitler youths were the actors of Nazi ideology, Jewish youth's were the recipients. The experiences of Hitler Youth are simultaneously, sometimes comparable and also completely different from the experiences of Jewish youth during World War II. With the outbreak of WWII in 1939, there were approximately 1.6 million Jewish children living in Germany and surrounding territories. By the end of WWII, somewhere between 1 million and 1.5 million of those children were dead.⁷

Three weeks after the start of World War II, Nazis ordered all Jews living under German control be transported and confined to ghettos. The ghettos were created to both remove Jews from public view and keep Jews in a centralized location, which would make executing the final solution easier. Life in the ghettos was exceptionally brutal as Jews lived in overcrowded, dilapidated buildings. Nazis ensured that there were shortages of heat, health services and food, in part to minimize the cost of running the ghettos and to keep Jews competitive with one another for survival.⁸ In fact, food rationed by Germans provided Jews an average of 184 calories a day, as compared to today's recommended 2,000 calorie a day diet.⁹ By 1942, a significant number of ghettos were being liquidated and sent to labor or death camps. The first groups of Jews to be deported were those who were viewed as useless for labor and a drain on ghetto life, the disable, elderly and children. Between the harsh conditions within the ghettos and deportation, chances of surviving were very slim. Moreover, the likelihood of death for children held in ghettos was higher than the death rate of adults. Since adolescents required more calories and young adolescents were not able-bodied enough for arduous labor, very few would make it out of the war alive. An estimated 15,000 children younger than fifteen years old entered the Theresienstadt ghetto between 1942 and 1944; however, roughly one hundred of these children survived the war.¹⁰

At the onset of the Holocaust, many children were killed as they were seen as a drain on ghetto life and useless for labor camps. Jewish children also died from disease, malnutrition and medical experiments. The increasing persecution and eradication of

Jewish children became increasingly more critical to Hitler's final solution as children posed the greatest threat for continuing the Jewish race. When Auschwitz was liberated in 1945, 451 out of the total 9,000 surviving prisoners were children.¹¹ A majority of Jewish children who survived the Holocaust did so in hiding. Many Jewish children in the Holocaust were saved by others who took them in and many children aided in the survival of others. Jewish children were often used to transport goods, relay information and hide food. Charlene Schiff, a Polish child living in the Horochow ghetto, recounts her experiences stealing "... a slice of bread... a carrot, or a potato, or an egg."¹² Despite the fact that Charlene was forbidden by her mother to steal food, since the punishment was execution, she continued to bring food to her family. Charlene later survived by hiding in the woods outside of the ghetto until she was later liberated by Soviet troops. Charlene's story is just one of many Jewish children who survived the horrors of the Holocaust with their own wit and the help of others. The United States Holocaust Museum offers a number of first-hand accounts of Jewish children and their experiences in hiding that would be of great interest to our students.

Vietnam

Colonization and the process of decolonization will serve as the basis for examining the proceeding case studies in Asia and Africa. Western colonization, and often the mass exodus of Western money and authority that occurred during decolonization, is the common thread for political upheavals and disorder as seen throughout the forthcoming studies. The case studies that address conflict in Vietnam, Rwanda, Burma and Uganda can be linked back to colonization and would be well suited for any course that addresses themes of imperialism and colonization.

The origins of the war in Vietnam begin with the French colonization of Vietnam, which ended in 1954 after the Vietnamese gained their independence. Once independent, elections were slated to be held in 1956 to determine who would run the new Vietnamese government; however, the elections never took place. Meanwhile, the United States was entrenched in the Cold War and aggressively attempting to contain Communist power and expansion in various regions of the world. It seemed likely that Ho Chi Minh, the leader of Vietnam's independence movement and supporter of Communism, would take power in Vietnam and challenge the United State's attempts to contain Communism.¹³

It was determined by the U.S. government that a non-communist South Vietnam was necessary for America's national security. At the time of Kennedy's assassination there were 23,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam and by 1965, nearly 500,000 troops from the United States had been deployed to fight the increasingly complicated and bloody war in Vietnam.¹⁴ As the death toll rose on all sides, thousands of American civilians and veterans protested the United States involvement and the brutality of the war persisting in Vietnam. Images of burning villages, crying mothers and newscasts of body bags

arriving daily made the immense number of casualties known; however, as is the case in many conflicts, the lesser known victims remained the children involved.

During the war, both Vietnamese and American children would take part in combat. Young American soldiers were drafted by the thousands and Vietnamese children were coerced to fight for both the Viet Cong and anti-Communist forces. However, the Vietnam War greatly and tragically affected numerous children other than those in combat. Perhaps the largest number of child victims as result of the Vietnam War surfaced after the fighting ended.

When U.S. troops evacuated Saigon in 1975, over 170,000 Vietnamese escaped the country; but, many of those left behind would face further hardships at the hands of the Viet Cong. Thousands of children fathered by American soldiers remained in Vietnam and would suffer from ridicule and abandonment for years to come. Amerasian children, as they would later be called, were often referred to as “half-breeds” and “children of the dust” and were often left on the doorsteps of orphanages or thrown out of their homes following the war.¹⁵ One photographer, who documented life in South Vietnam after the fall of Saigon, recounted her interaction with two Amerasian orphans:

Minh, with long lashes, hazel eyes, a few freckles and a handsome Caucasian face, moved like a crab on all four limbs, likely the result of polio. Minh's mother had thrown him out of the house at the age of 10, and at the end of each day his friend, Thi, would carry the stricken boy on his back to an alleyway where they slept. On that day in 1985, Minh looked up at [the photographer] with a hint of a wistful smile and held out a flower he had fashioned from the aluminum wrapper in a pack of cigarettes.¹⁶

Amerasian children represented all that the Vietnamese disdained from the war and the American presence in Vietnam. The horrific treatment of Amerasian children and the large number of led the U.S. government to begin an initiative called “Operation Babylift,” which was created to relocate Amerasian children and their relatives to the United States. Minh, the child described above, is one of the many Amerasians who would be relocated to the United States; however, he and several others would have many more hardships to face. Despite the implementation of “Operation Babylift,” many Amerasian children would remain behind in Vietnam and only about 3% of those who arrived in the United States would successfully locate their fathers.¹⁷ Many of those who successfully arrived in the United States were still haunted by the trauma of the war and its aftermath. Many Amerasian children were found to suffer from depression, an inability to adjust to foster homes and were found to be more likely to develop problems with substance abuse.¹⁸

The story of Amerasian children who were involved in the Vietnam War is one of injustice and perseverance. Through examining the conflict in Vietnam and looking at the lives of Amerasian children, our students will be able to see that those in combat are not the only victims of conflict. Moreover, Amerasian children represent the aftermath of war that remains even after a cease-fire or peace agreement has been made. The voices of Amerasian children and the voices of other children who inherit the wars of adults are particularly powerful because they represent the aftermath of war that remains even after a cease-fire or peace agreement has been made.

Rwanda

Rwanda is a nation that was once a colonial state and has since been plagued by persecution, starvation, and genocide. In 1994, in the wake of decolonization, one of the bloodiest and most brutal genocides occurred. An ethnic divide between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis was drastically exacerbated with the presence of colonial forces. Belgian colonists arrived in the early 1900s and made the claim that Tutsis were superior to Hutus. After years of a Tutsi authority in Rwanda, the Belgians left and Hutus seized a position of authority. Years of tension, resentment and an economic crisis culminated into a series of events, namely the assassination of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, triggering the genocide in Rwanda. In an attempt at retribution, the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus was ordered by the government. Soldiers, police officers and average citizens were encouraged, and sometime forced to take part in the killings. Rewards, such as money or food, were often provided to those Hutus who killed Tutsis.¹⁹ After 100 days of killing, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were dead.

During the Rwandan genocide, children were a presence in every aspect of the conflict. Many Hutu children were indoctrinated and prepared for killing through mass media and a barrage of propaganda constantly messaged by the Rwandan government.²⁰ Children, especially impoverished and orphaned, were also actively recruited in schools and public spaces to supply the Hutu youth army, the Interahamwe, with troops.²¹ While serving in the Interahamwe, children were given tasks to desensitize them to the mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Often they would be instructed to kill, torture or mutilate on command and were also provided with drugs to further reinforce the desensitization process.²²

Within the first month of the massacre, Hutu fighters were commanded to specifically target Tutsi women and children. In previous conflicts in Rwanda, the killing of women and children had been discouraged; however, similar to the case in Germany, the Hutu military now argued that women and children posed the greatest threat of continuing the Tutsi blood line.²³ Many children lost their lives as result of the genocide, but even more children were orphaned. Many children were so young during the conflict that little of their identity, other than their names, is known. One orphaned child by the name of

Uwamahoro explains that he is unsure of when he was born "...because it was at the time all the trouble started. [He] didn't know much about my family because when the war started I was very young, but what I do remember is that I was happy..."²⁴ Uwamahoro now lives in an orphanage among other children who faced similar struggles and lost family as result of the war.

The case of the Rwandan genocide is a prime example of how the lines between victim and perpetrator are blurred when examining the experiences of adolescents. Of the 120,000 people detained for involvement in since the 1994 genocide, roughly 4,500 people held for crimes against humanity were reportedly younger than 18 at the time of the genocide.²⁵ Additionally, thousands of those who were children doing the war live in orphanages with few remnants of their life before the war. Presently, there are still several organizations that attempt to rehabilitate the children that fought as soldiers in the Rwandan genocide and there are several organizations supporting orphans. Recently, there has been a surge in organizations that attempt to address the heightened concern for a new generation of child soldiers trained by Hutu extremists operating out of the Democratic Republic of Congo. With the number of victims still reeling from the genocide, the Rwandan case study will cause students to refine their definition of a hero and will also present multiple opportunities to fulfill their definition of a hero through activism.

Burma

This particular case study is very personal for me and perhaps serves as the most influential case study in designing this unit. I developed my own sense of purpose through activism as result of the case of children in Burma. When I was nineteen years old, I met a student activist who told me about the plight of Burmese citizens and their fight for justice.

I learned that along the Thai-Burmese border there exist several refugee camps that hundreds of thousands of "displaced" Burmese refugees call home. These camps, which are far more permanent than the title "camp" would suggest, sit in the rainforest miles from any populated Thai city. Survival in the camps is dependent on outside donations; however inside the camps, there is a community that operates as an independent entity, separate from any government or nation, complete with churches and temples, supply stores, workshops and schools.

Upon learning about the atrocities and hardship faced by the Burmese, I visited one of the refugee camps, which would forever change my perception of the power of awareness. While in the refugee camp, I encountered a school...an open-air hut with two walls, one in the front of the room and one in the back, which more closely resembled a picnic shelter. About fifty children were sitting hip to hip on woven mats that covered a

dirt floor. Several benches, a foot or so off the ground, served as desks and students thumbed through outdated textbooks with broken spines and missing pages. A Catholic priest stood at the front of the room, introduced us and shortly after, the students began to perform a traditional Burmese song in praise of Karen culture. Many of the students had prosthetic limbs or walked with the assistance of crutches as result of their encounter with landmines. Interestingly, the demeanor of the students was what struck me the most. Smiling, kind and eager to learn, these children demonstrated continence that seemed completely counter to the war-torn nation they fled from.

Burma is not unique in their history of colonialism. During the 19th and part of the 20th centuries, Burma was a colony of Britain until gaining their independence in 1948. The Burmese enjoyed a brief period of autonomy until an army coup then gained control over the government. Despite extended periods of resistance, the military regime ultimately remained in power through tyrannical means. On August 8, 1988, students, activists and community leaders organized an uprising to protest the brutality, restriction and dictatorial nature of the regime in Burma. However, protestors were met with violence; thousands were shot dead, and torture and imprisonment awaited the surviving participants.²⁶

The citizens of Burma have continued to face brutal repression by the current military junta. The junta has additionally used adolescents to enforce the litany of laws throughout the military state. In response to this oppression, Burmese minorities have also engaged their own children in fighting against the military, which further complicates the division between “right” and “wrong.”

A Human Rights Watch report released a study detailing the acquisition and treatment of child soldiers in Burma. In a nation led by a totalitarian regime and fraught with poverty, children are often sold into both the government and non-state armed forces of Burma. Some 30 non-government armed factions are believed to have child soldiers as combatants, but this population is believed to be less than Burma’s government military, called the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw is officially a volunteer army with the enlistment age as 18; however, investigations by human right organizations have found that a large number of new enlists are in fact children from impoverished homes with little education.²⁷

One possible explanation for the large number of child recruits is a decree made by the Burmese government in 2006 ordering commanders in the Tatmadaw to produce roughly 7,000 newly enlisted soldiers every month.²⁸ The pressure of fulfilling quotas coupled with the desperation of poverty rampant in Burma, a climate has been established wherein the use child soldiers is pervasive. Many boys are either sold into the military or coerced so that quotas can be met. For example, Human Rights Watch officials interviewed a boy who was recruited at the age of 11 about his experience. At the time of his recruitment, he weighed 70 pounds and stood four feet three inches tall.²⁹ In addition

to his young age, his size meant he would have failed meet the military's requirements; however a recruiter bribed his medical examiner to enlist the child under false pretenses.

Another specific case of a child soldier in Burma is the story of Maung Zaw Oo. By the age of 16, Maung had been forcibly recruited into Burma's national army twice. First he was recruited at age 14 in 2004, he escaped, and was then recruited again the following year. After his second recruitment he learned that the corporal who recruited him had received a small sum of money, a sack of rice, and cooking oil in exchange for his recruitment. According to Maung, "The corporal sold me..." and a battalion bought him for an even higher sum of money.³⁰

Just as children have been used in Burma, many children have actively opposed the repression and abuses by the government. One child activist of the Burmese movement for freedom is a woman by the name of Ma Thin Thin Aye. Ma Thin was a high school student during the Burmese student uprising in 1988. As one of the most outspoken activists, she was arrested in 1989 and imprisoned for more than a year. Once released, she went into hiding with her husband, all the while continuing to organize protests and join forces other activists. Most recently, Ma Thin was arrested in 2007 by the Burmese government and sentenced to 65 years in prison for anti-government actions.³¹

In the particular case of Burma, students will be able to evaluate how adolescents have been both the victims, perpetrators and heroes. They will also be able to analyze the cyclical nature of child abuse when the response to violence is met with more violence.

Uganda

The final case study that will be examined in this unit is the role of child soldiers in contemporary Uganda and the practice of abductions to supply militias. One of the longest Civil Wars in Africa is the conflict between rebel forces and various government factions in Uganda. Established as a British colony in the late 1800s, Uganda won her independence in 1962. Within a few short years, a dictator by the name of Idi Amin seized power of the Ugandan government. Amin's reign has been characterized as a "reign of terror" wherein 300,000 lives were taken in a period of seven years. Eventually, Amin fled upon losing control of the government to anti-Amin forces, and although his presence was gone, the brutality remained. Uganda has essentially been entrenched in a brutal twenty-three year long civil war that has left millions of victims in its wake.

The Lord's Resistance Army, under the direction of rebel leader Joseph Kony, is the most powerful and notorious rebel factions in Uganda, and it is common knowledge that the LRA has used child soldiers since its conception. Thousands of children currently fight with the LRA and most have joined out of desperation or were abducted. The LRA has gained a significant amount of power and influence since 1994. Part of the reason the

LRA has remained such a powerful force is their brutal tactics and harsh punishments for those who threaten to abandon their ranks. Abductees, adult and child, are threatened with death if they try to escape. In fact, many of the abducted children are forced to "...beat, club, or trample to death other children and adults who attempt to escape."³²

Between 2002 and 2003, it is believed that the LRA has abducted more than 8,400 children to be used as soldiers. One thirteen-year-old boy explained that he was abducted together with his four brothers in 2002. He was told that he could not serve with all five of his brothers since it would increase the risk of escaping. Instead, he explained that the LRA "...tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them with sticks until the two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight. My youngest brother was nine years old."³³

The LRA's use of child soldiers is exceptionally brutal given the fact that most are abducted, and the atrocities the children are forced to commit are more heinous beyond comprehension. The experiences of girls in war-torn Uganda are no exception to the brutality. Young girls are often abducted and must work long hours running supplies, gathering food, and performing domestic duties for LRA commanders. Often, after they reach puberty, girls are forced into sexual slavery as "wives" of LRA commanders. They are subjected to sexual abuse, "...forced pregnancy, and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS."³⁴

This case study of Uganda perhaps has the most potential to inspire students to actively oppose the use of child soldiers. "Invisible Children" is a student organization that has chapters throughout the world on school campuses and has gained a significant amount of supporters in their efforts to stop child abductions in Uganda. Presently, I advise a club at my school that fundraises for "Invisible Children" and many students have found inspiration and purpose through their participation in this club. Organizations, such as "Invisible Children," should be introduced within the case studies as tangible tools for activism for our students

Strategies

I have attempted to incorporate a variety of strategies throughout the unit that will provide content knowledge, cause students to be critical of their criterion for a hero and foster a desire for activism. Each of the subsequent strategies can be used in any and all of the case studies. Some teachers may find that one strategy lends itself more logically to their specific students over another; however each strategy can be used in all of the selected case studies.

Defining a Hero

The first assignment students will be required to complete is the task of “Defining a Hero.” This assignment will require students to respond to all of the afore-mentioned questions, 1-7, in at least 5 sentences each. Following their responses, students will need to make a list of 5 characteristics they feel every hero should possess. Within each case study, students will be required to research a hero that meets these characteristics and explain why they meet their hero archetype. Their criterion will be built upon and amended as explained in the proceeding sections.

Document Based Assignment

For each of the case studies, students will examine photographs of the adolescents who were affected by the conflict. From these images students will be required to work in pairs to complete a “Photo Essay.” This assignment requires that students group photographs of adolescents (no less than 6 and no more than 10) from one or more of the conflicts and sort the photos using any criterion they chose. For example, students may chose to group photos of children by region or they may opt to categorize the children by “heroes” and “villains.” It is important that students are able to create their own criteria so that the results have a more significant effect. Each pair of students will be required to then explain and defend their categorization. After several pairs have shared with one another, students will be required to re-categorize their photos using an entirely new criterion. Once the final categorization is complete, the entire class will discuss their impressions and criterion with the class. The teacher should reveal the context and story behind each photo to illicit a class discussion about impressions versus reality. The “Photo Essay” assignment will help to dissect some of the preconceived notions many students may have about categorizing heroes, perpetrators, victims and villains. Additionally, the photographs will help to put faces on the history of the conflicts they are researching.

Primary Sources

In addition to photographs, students will be required read primary source documents that communicate the experiences of those affected by the conflicts. Primary writings from the perspective of witnesses, perpetrators and victims are an authentic way for students to connect with the material and the voices of their peers. Multiple primary sources for all of the addressed conflicts, especially those published by Human Rights Watch, are easily accessed and are student-appropriate. After analyzing the primary source documents, students will be asked to write a journal entry from the perspective of the author of the primary source. Within their journal entry they will need to recall causes of the conflict and explain their hope for a resolve. The entry will need to include both factual information as well as an emotional response to the conflict; therefore, each journal entry must include a list of pre-determined vocabulary terms that will help to illustrate their historical understanding of the conflict. Secondly, students will also be required to write a letter in response to the author of the primary source. Students can opt to compose the

letter from their own, current position, or write a letter from the point of view of an opponent of the author.

Independent Research

Following the examination of each case study, students will be required to conduct their own research to find a hero that emerged as result of the conflict. Students will write a brief biography (2-3 pages) for the hero they select. They will then need to write an additional page explain how the selected figure meets their own criterion for a hero. Finally, students will need to add an additional characteristic or delete a characteristic from their previous list of 5 as result of their research and explain why their list was amended as such. This process will be completed for all of the case studies.

Culminating Project

The culminating project for this unit will require students to combine their content knowledge and their definition of heroism to pursue social activism. Each student will be required to research and select a humanitarian organization that seeks to repair damages from a previous conflict or resolve a current conflict. Students will then create a product that will raise awareness for the organization and assist in the mission of the organization. The first task will require students to write a brief overview of the organization (2-3 pages) and present information about the organization to a small group within the class. Next, students will have to bring in a tangible product that demonstrates how they assisted the agency. Students can contribute to the agency by creating a flier, brochure or poster that raises awareness for the agency or begin a chapter of the organization on campus. Finally, students will use their template and criterion for a hero to illustrate how their actions have been heroic. They will describe their actions and experiences (3 pages) by using their most current list of characteristics and their original responses in the preceding assignment. In short, the final product for the curriculum unit will require students to fulfill their definition of a hero through their own acts of social activism and use their activism to spread acts of heroism to counter current injustices. The final product is intended to illustrate the capacity our students have to create, positive social change and empower them to influence others so that so many of the conflicts we have learned about need not be relived again.

Endnotes

¹ Carmelo Lisciotto. "The Hitler Youth." *The History Learning Site*. Available from http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/hitler_youth.htm; accessed 19 October 2009.

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³ Singer, P.W. *Children at War* (Los Angeles, Ca: University of California Press, 2006) 14-15.

⁴ Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team, "The Hitler Youth: Jungsturm Adolf Hitler," <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/hitleryouth/index.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The History Place: Hitler Youth, "Hitler's Boy Soldiers," <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/hitleryouth/hj-boy-soldiers.htm>.

⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial, "Plight of Jewish Children," <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006124>.

⁸ Eleanor H. Ayer. *In the Ghettos: Teens Who Survived the Ghettos of the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 1999) 14-15.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Plight of Jewish Children," <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006124>.

¹² Quoted from Charlene Schiff in "Children During the Holocaust: Personal Stories," http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_oi.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005142&MediaId=1111.

¹³ Diane Hart. *History Alive!: The United States* (Palo Alto, Ca: Teachers' Curriculum Institute, 2002) 444.

¹⁴ J.M. Roberts. *Twentieth Century: The History of the World 1901 to 2000* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1999) 673.

¹⁵ David Lamb “Children of the Vietnam War,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2009, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ BBC News, “Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1288230.stm>.

²⁰ Singer, *Children at War*, 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

²² *Ibid.*, 81.

²³ Human Rights Watch, “Extending the Genocide,” http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno4-7-04.htm#P1272_.

²⁴ (The Rwanda Project, 2008).

²⁵ (Child Soldiers Global Report, 8)

²⁶ (Burma Campaign UK, 1991)

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Sold to be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma,” 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Human Rights Watch, “Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda,” 8.

³³ Ibid., 6.

³⁴ Ibid., 8.

Annotated Bibliography

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NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 1999. This book offers student-friendly accounts of the experiences of children living in the ghettos during the Holocaust. The accounts are brief,

primary sources that would be beneficial for students researching heroes who have emerged from World War II.

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<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php> (accessed 29 September 2009). The Burma

Campaign is one of the oldest and most established Burma advocacy groups in existence.

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(accessed 19 September 2009). The US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s website is an excellent resource for both students and teachers. The site include several narratives,

including audio clips, from survivors of the Holocaust.