

Finding the Shades of Gray between Victims and Villains in War

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Rational

Through participating in this seminar, discussing the role of children in war and conflict, I have found a way to meet both academic and social needs of my students. By teaching my students about history through the eyes of children much like themselves, I believe I can help them to appreciate and understand what has taken place in history, while teaching them to empathize and care about people in current conflicts around the world. With their interests sparked, I will be able to meet their academic needs as well by increasing their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. The circumstances that lead youth to become involved in war connects with the challenges many students in my school's population face. Many of their young lives, already touched by loss and conflict in their neighborhoods and homes, echo the emotions of youth in conflicts throughout history.

Students can relate to the stories of child soldiers and gang members who choose their life paths because it is the best option available. By teaching my students the stories of youth who chose to get involved in war and others who had no choice I will help them to learn about their ability to navigate the path for their own life story. They will hear stories, like their own, where youth have no control over the circumstances that lead them to conflict, but they survive and make a better life for themselves. As students analyze the shades of gray found between victims and villains, they will learn to be empathetic and less judgmental of the guilt or innocence of those involved in war. Students will learn to see a conflict from multiple perspectives, and gain an understanding of how all sides view their perspective as justified.

I teach middle school at a separate school in Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a large urban school district with a diverse population. My school is located downtown, as we service students in kindergarten through 12th grade with severe emotional disabilities from across the district. The average class size is eight students with a teacher and teacher assistant. Students that come to our school need a highly structured setting with these small staff to student ratios. These students have been unsuccessful in less restrictive settings including a separate class in a regular school. There is a high level of poverty in my school and the majority of students receive free or reduced lunch. Many of our students have gaps in their academic abilities due to time spent in higher levels of care, many come to our school after participating in intensive

treatment programs. A large portion of our students live in foster care or reside in group-homes.

Although I teach in a unique setting, many of the challenges I face are no different from those of any middle school teacher. I wonder what I can do in my classroom to provide a safe atmosphere in which students feel free to express themselves and to understand that we do not all have to see things the same way. I want my students to be able to give and earn respect from their peers. I want to teach them the power of being yourself and not falling victim to the powers of peer pressure. I often struggle to get my students to recognize the importance of our history and why they should, “care about kids in Africa.” As I begin a history lesson there is always one student that asks why we have to learn about “this,” arguing, it already happened so why does it matter. The lack of empathy and respect that some of my students come into my classroom with is rooted in a lack of understanding and valuing what has and is going on in the world. The purpose of this curriculum unit is to help them understand the complexity of the world, while recognizing the simple humanity of those involved in conflict and war.

Objectives

Many of my students struggle with basic reading comprehension skills that interfere with their ability to study history. Research shows that difficulties with reading comprehension can stem from many weaknesses including, but not limited to struggles with making inferences, inability to monitoring one’s own reading comprehension, lack of vocabulary and difficulties or disabilities in the working memory. ¹ No matter the cause, there is evidence that there is a complex relationship between spoken, written and oral language skills; ² the ones students need to think critically and to express these thoughts. This in turn, inhibits their ability to understand what is happening today around the world, often causing students to find little or no value in social studies. With an exceptional population, such as students with severe emotional disabilities, there is also the constant challenge of keeping them engaged and motivated long enough to interpret the information provided, analyze the author’s purpose and guide them to form their own opinions.

Studies show that many Americans struggle to understand international conflicts. These studies also suggest that many students obtain their knowledge of international events and conflicts from the mass media. ³ My students, like many Americans, do not want to take the time to form their own opinions. Rather, they want to have opinions given to them by the associated press as they flash across the bottom of the television screen or stated on the evening newscast. I want to teach them to analyze and question the newspaper or major television networks and not to blindly believe political and social propaganda. This is a challenge for students as they all too often accept a posting on MySpace, or the words of an uninformed celebrity as fact. In today’s society with media

hitting students from so many angles, and the ease with which things appear online, I fear, as explained in an article by Peter Cookson, that unlike the learners of Socrates time, that may not have understood anything but their own ignorance; my students will simply not be aware of their own ignorance⁴. I designed this curriculum unit to help students see their own ignorance, accepting that what we see on the surface is not the whole story. Students will learn to think before they judge, and look at issues from multiple angles learning to respect and appreciate people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. The goal of this unit is to teach students to take the time to dig deep into issues before making judgments. Students will learn to recognize the shades of gray between right and wrong, good and bad, victim and villain, guilt and innocence.

Through this unit, students will learn the skills needed to think and read critically to master the skills of the 21st century learner. Students will go beyond basic comprehension skills, to analyzing the more difficult questions in history and in current events. Students will learn that there is not always a clear yes or no answer, that there is not always a right and wrong side to an issue. I will guide them to understand the delicate relationship between causes and effects, and how one historical event can have multiple effects. As students begin to understand the causes and effects in history, they will begin to see how history affects the current conflicts around the world. In addition, we will examine propaganda techniques used throughout history and in the media today. We will discuss the fine line between fact and opinion, and the importance of recognizing that line. Students will identify the effects of propaganda, and how confidently stated opinions are often mistaken for facts.

Another goal of this unit is to provide students with a clear emotional connection to history, to put a face with the sequence of events and statistics they read about in history books. One of the most effective ways to present history is through the words of people that lived through it.⁵ To help my students understand the impact of children like themselves being involved in war, they must see, hear, read, and empathize with children who have been to war. Students will discover how teens like themselves get involved in war and conflict, and the effects that conflict has on their lives. Students will make these discoveries through examining case studies. These case studies will explore the lives of child soldiers throughout history, from World War I to the more recent conflict in the Middle East and Africa.

We will discuss how motive, responsibility, persuasion, beliefs and needs influence a youth's decision to join a war, if they have a choice. We will also study the impact of circumstances, and how these circumstances lead to few or, in some cases, no choices. We will study cases in which youth were able to choose to join as well as cases in which they were forced. Students will reflect on the following questions: *Are they wrong for joining? Are they wrong if they willingly joined, but not if they were forced? Does guilt depend on the actions committed once a child soldier?* Students will write a fictitious narrative after studying each case study, which will encourage them to think what they

would do if they were in that child's shoes, and to help them examine and develop their own opinions in answering these challenging questions.

This unit will examine four main categories of child soldiers: Those that volunteered, those recruited, those drafted and finally those violently forced to enter conflict. As we analyze children in each of these categories, we will look at the impact being in crisis had on children's decision-making skills. Students will examine each individual situation and see how this complicates labeling these children as victims or villains, and if and how this affects the level of responsibility the youth have. Students will reflect on the challenging questions such as, how responsible are these youth for the crimes they committed while acting as a soldier? Can you confidently state guilty or innocent, and why?

To increase the personal connections students make with the stories we read, hear and watch they will continuously examine how the lives of child soldiers relate to their own lives. Students will reflect on times they fell into these categories. For example, when have you made difficult choices, or made choices without analyzing the consequences? Students will reflect on times in their lives where they had no choice, and how this influenced their ability to deal with the effects. We will discuss peer pressure, turning points in their lives, how violence and even war has affected them. Once we have established the categories of child soldiers and examined case studies from wars and current conflicts, students will examine and reflect of youth in America, looking deeply at the causes and effects of gangs and the reasons behind the violence in our streets.

After we look at gangs and the similarities and difference between gang members and child soldiers, students will again come back to the categories of victims and villains. Can we place all of our case studies in these two simple categories? We will discuss other labels such as survivor; hero, aggressor, and activist, students will look at how different labels have the connotation of guilt or innocence, and imply a level or responsibility. This final categorization of child soldiers has no right or wrong answer; students will be required to support their opinions for their placements of the case study youth and will explain their decisions through a multimedia project. This project will be an original student created outlook on child soldiers. Students will explain what it means to be a hero, a survivor, an aggressor or an activist in their presentation as well as explain how the case studies they selected support these definitions.

This Unit requires a minimum of six weeks to complete, given a 90-minute humanities block, allowing for one week examining each role, one week making comparisons to gangs, and a final week for students to prepare their presentations. This unit will cover standards in middle school language arts and social studies as well as teach students valuable social skills. Students will learn to disagree appropriately, work in groups, and express their thoughts. These skills will help students to develop tools they can use when dealing with the peer pressure and other challenges they may face in the community. Students will learn to summarize, draw conclusions, distinguish between facts and

opinion and identify causes and effects. Students will read and interpret a variety of literary sources including personal narratives and poetry. Students will learn about conflicts in Africa and Asia, which is a part of the social studies curriculum in seventh grade. Students studying the history of the United States, in the eighth grade, will look at the history of the draft and America's role in the conflicts we study. Students will apply their knowledge in the creation of a multi-media presentation to express their own opinions and to summarize what they learned in the unit.

Background

This curriculum unit, as mentioned above relies heavily on the use of case studies. Students will need to understand the definitions of the four categories of child soldiers, as well as pertinent background knowledge explaining the causes and circumstances of the wars, which are the backdrop for the case studies. I will provide students with the necessary background information before we read or view the case studies.

Volunteers

Young people have been volunteering for military services as long as there has been a military. Children fought during the Crusades, in the Napoleonic wars, and in our own country as we fought for independence during the Revolutionary War, to name a few. These boys often volunteered, but many have different reasons for choosing to do so. When looking at reasons for volunteering across history and through the current conflicts in Africa and Asia it is clear that many youth join out of desperation and a need for survival.⁶ While the use of the term volunteering in these situations may be debatable, for this unit we will define volunteering as choosing to join without coercion, recruitment or force. Youth volunteers can be broken into two basic categories: Volunteering out of need, and volunteering out of want. Examples for need are to escape abusive family situations or forced marriages. In addition, youth separated from their families or orphaned often join out of a need for survival- for food, security, and for health care.⁷ Some youth that want to volunteer are seeking revenge, while others have a desire for power, honor, glamour and excitement.⁸

Recruited

Sources say that young people are often preferred by military leaders as they can be manipulated, terrorized and are often willing to accept dangerous assignments because they lack understanding of their own mortality.⁹ There will be a heavy focus on the propaganda techniques used to persuade young people in this category. We will look at how governments as well as rebel groups played on youths' sense of victimization,

commitment to their religion and idealistic tendencies to motivate them to join their causes. We will examine the role of schools in this movement through examples such as Nazi Youth and the role of Hamas in Palestine. We will compare these schools with military recruitment in our own country. In the United States, we value our freedom and celebrate our independence each year; students will be encouraged to reflect on the similarities and differences in the desires of other organizations that recruit young men and women. Students will evaluate where the differences lie, and how perspective makes a difference in seeing something as good or evil.

Drafted

The term military draft is one almost exclusively used in America. The broader term found throughout the world is conscription. Conscription is involuntary labor required by an established authority, and typically refers to service in the armed forces.¹⁰ For this unit we will define the draft as the selective services act does, requiring all men between the ages of 18 and 35 to register. We will examine how the minimum age for the draft has changed throughout our own countries history and discuss what students believe is the “magic number” that makes a boy a man. Students will examine the stories of young men drafted in the American military during the Vietnam War.

Forced

For the unit we will define forced as just that, youth taken against their will and that of their families to join military and rebel groups. Many of the youth forced into service are serving with terrorist or rebel groups, however there have been groups connected with governments kidnapping children such as those in Sierra Leone. We will look at the tactics used to transform children into child soldiers and the difficulty with which these youth face when they attempt to re-enter society.

World War I

When presenting the case studies from World War I students must first understand the context of these stories. Students will learn the direct and indirect causes of World War I. As discussed in the seminars, the direct cause of the war was the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria on June 28, 1914 by Gavrilo Princip, a nationalist from Serbia. The indirect cause is the anger and disputes over land, which had been developing for years. Many people looked at this war as justified, and the only way to solve this conflict. People believed it was going to be a glorious war, which was going to be short and victorious.

Some youth joined the ranks due to the glorification of this war. Others saw this as a chance to become a hero, as some felt they were not good at anything else and or simply had a desire for adventure. Nationalism, pride and military beliefs passed down from one generation to the next made clear, for many young men, that this was the only thing they should do. For others this was a way out of a dead end life, they were able to eat better, and for many it would simply give them something to do. Students will explore case studies of volunteers in World War I by reading excerpts from the book Boy Soldiers of the Great War.

Liberian Civil War

The Liberian Civil War, fought from 1989 to 1996, resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of young people and their families. This loss accounts for an estimated 10% of the nation's population.¹¹ This war started because of an unstable and tyrannical government. In December of 1989, the National Patriotic Liberation Front (NPLF), led by a warlord Charles Taylor, invaded Liberia. The NPLF fought against a second group led by warlords called the United Liberia Movement for Democracy (ULIMO). This war resulted in many civilian casualties including a genocidal attack on a Lutheran Church in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia.¹² As the civil war continued and expanded, both armies recruited boys totaling an estimated one-fourth of the armed forces in 1990.¹³ Boys ranged in age as young as six years to twenty years old. According to the Liberian Red Cross, some of these boys joined the army to get a gun that would help them survive in the war torn climate, others joined to avenge the deaths of their loved ones.¹⁴ Escaping a life of poverty and a chance for survival are also motives some youth have to join. In a CNN article a young boy recalls his friends encouraging him to join, believing it would be fun.¹⁵

The History of the Draft in America

Throughout our country's history, the government has gone through periods of mandatory drafting for military service. The first recorded draft took place during the end of the Civil War in 1863, signed by President Lincoln stating all men 18 years of age or older could be drafted. During World War I, a new law came into effect requiring all men between 18 and 35 to register for the draft.¹⁶

During the Vietnam, war there was an increased focus on the equity of the draft, with the weekly casualties reaching 100 per week.¹⁷ Critics argued that because of the student deferment policy, upper class youth were disproportionately protected from service. The argument was that those in the higher income bracket could avoid service indefinitely through graduate school and occupation deferment. The increased attention and criticism of the Selective Services led to the initiation of the lottery in 1969.¹⁸ In 1973 congress

approved a law to create an all-volunteer army, however all men in the United States are required to register at the age of 18 with the Selective Services.¹⁹

Hitler Youth

According to the Encyclopedia of Youth and War, the Nazis established Hitler Youth groups as early as 1926. The Hitler Youth organization had several sub-groups, which allowed the organization to develop soldiers from the age of six, the age in which Hitler believed that childhood ended.²⁰ As discussed in the seminar eventually participation in the Hitler youth became mandatory, and all children registered with the organization at the age of 10, parents who resisted faced fines or jail time. The organization taught youth to be competitive, as well as how the leader-follower relationship works.²¹

Many of the youth enjoyed their time with the Hitler youth, as described in Alfons Heck's book, A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika.²² Heck describes the fun, adventure, and sense of accomplishment many young people felt, as they were part of this movement. Hitler Youth participated in many exciting events including the opening ceremonies of the 1936 summer Olympics and the yearly celebration, the Day of Hitler Youth, at the Nuremberg Stadium on September 10th.²³

Palestine- Israeli Conflict

As explained in the Encyclopedia of Youth and War, The land once called Palestine is the center of cultural and religious conflict. In the 1800's Zionists, Jewish people committed to the establishment of a Jewish state, began to buy land and settle in Palestine. When the British government gained control of the country, they were in support of the Zionist movement, but met resistance from the Arabs; this resistance and resentment continued to develop at the onset of the Second World War as many Jews fled Europe to escape the Nazis. This spike in immigrants led to the creation of strict immigration laws created by the British. Despite these laws, many Jews, including Holocaust survivors, made their way into Palestine, both legally and illegally.²⁴

In 1947, the United Nations stepped in trying to bring peace to Palestine by dividing the land into two areas. The Palestinians controlled the land along the west bank and Israel controlled land along the Mediterranean Sea. This division of land, rejected by the Arab nations, led to increased terrorist attacks from both sides. Later that same year the UN tried a second plan, dividing the land into 4 territories: one Jewish and three Palestinian territories with the goal of making Palestine and Israel a united nation. The conflict then shifted to who had control over Jerusalem leading to violent attacks in 1948 from both sides.²⁵ Fighting continued, and many Palestinians, left with nothing, lived in refugee camps despite a cease-fire agreement. The conflict continued over the years but

rose again, during the Six-Day War in which Egypt and Syria battled with Israel. Israel claimed additional territories including the Gaza strip and the West Bank of the Jordan River. As the years went on the terrorism continued including hijacking, bombing of public places, and the taking of hostages.²⁶

As discussed in the seminar, in 1987, young Palestinians participated in a protest, the Intifada. These youth along with many adults, outraged by the Israeli claimed territories, demanded that their homes and land be returned, as the soldiers pushed them back, the boys responded by throwing rocks and other items. The Israeli troops fired at the protesters in response to their attack, injuring and killing many teenagers. Since then, many young Palestinians have joined Hamas, an Islamic Resistance Movement whom are responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks, in particular suicide bombings. These youth choose to be involved, they are fighting to get back what they believe is rightfully theirs.

Uganda

As discussed in the seminar, one of the most notorious groups forcing children to join their ranks is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. This rebel group, started by Joseph Kony, initially had the goal of creating a state in Africa based on the 10 commandments. Over time, Kony's agenda has become unclear. Regardless of the rationale, he is responsible for the abduction, torture, and enslavement of thousands of children, 93% of which are between 7 and 16 years of age. Most of the youth abducted spend between one month and a year with the LRA.

In order for students to grasp the terror that these children go through, they must be aware of how groups such as the LRA turn these children into soldiers. As discussed in the seminar, the first step in turning a child into a soldier is typically through initiation tactics. Many children are terrorized, beaten, and often forced to kill other children or members of their own families or communities. Armies like the LRA provide children with drugs and alcohol to help numb the pain of these initiation acts as well as to inhibit their ability to make decisions. The next step of this process is to rebuild the identity of the child, to provide them with a surrogate family structure in their troops and parental figures in the leaders. Many of these youth even receive new names to go along with their new identities.

Sierra Leone

The Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group claiming the unjust, unequal treatment and management under the government, initiated the civil war in Sierra Leone, beginning in 1991.²⁷ The RUF claimed to be fighting to bring freedom and justice to Sierra Leone, ultimately fought for wealth and power, including the control of the country's diamond

mines.²⁸ Abducted children fought for government-backed troops, the Kamajors, as well as for the rebel troops.²⁹ Both sides were responsible for brutal attacks on villages including raiding and destroying villages, mutilating villagers with machetes, and capturing youth and forcing them to become child soldiers throughout the country.³⁰ Ishmael Beah describes the terror of these attacks in his book, A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.³¹ During the years of the war, half of the people fled the country, becoming the largest refugee group in Africa.³²

Strategies

Socratic Seminars

As described on the Greece Central School District's website, a Socratic Seminar is a group discussion developed around key questions.³³ These questions help guide students to share their opinions. The goal of a Socratic seminar is for students to carry on discussions with their peers, supporting or refuting statements made by one another while also learning to listen and respect the opinions of others. Prior to the beginning of the first seminar, it is a good idea to establish rules and procedures for participating with the class, such as how do students know when it is their turn to speak. The use of a talking stick or ball is a good strategy that can be utilized several different ways; students may choose who they pass it to after they share their thoughts or the item may simply be passed around the circle, allowing for the teacher to interject or pose a new question each time it makes a full circle. When using a reading passage, students need to have time to read or review the passage or other materials (such as photographs, videos, political cartoons, etc) before participating in the discussion. Students should also have the essential question to reflect on while they are reading or viewing the material for class prior to the beginning of the seminar.³⁴ It is best practice for student to sit at a table or in some other arranged circle to support the round table nature of a group discussion.

The teacher opens the seminar by asking the essential question. Teachers can use follow-up questions to facilitate students' understanding of the essential question. The website also suggests that teacher questions and comments should be kept to a minimum however, as the purpose of the Socratic seminar is to get students to converse with one another. It goes on to further explain the role of the teacher in this strategy is to be that of a facilitator, ensuring that students develop a deeper understanding of the topic and that students show respect for the various points of view shared in the discussion.³⁵ As students share their own opinions, they should provide evidence from the passage or other media to support their answers. Once the group has discussed the essential question, it is a good idea to ask additional questions to guide students to understand the main idea or theme of the selection. The lack of "correct" answers from these discussions will help students to see that different people have different opinions, which are not

necessarily right or wrong.

To conclude the activity, students will have the opportunity to reflect on the discussion by writing in their journals or completing some form of an exit ticket to share what they learned from the seminar. Exit tickets are small sheets of paper used to provide the teacher with a quick assessment of what students learned. These tickets or journal entries may have a prompt or specific question to answer or may simply be a place for students to write what they learned that day. This is also a good tool to allow students to express those last minute thoughts that you did not have time for them to share.

Graphic Organizers

Active reading strategies require students to predict, question, clarify and summarize what they are reading. Because many struggling readers do not naturally have or use these skills, it is best to scaffold the instruction for teaching these reading skills and gradually reduce the prompting you provide.³⁶ Throughout the unit, students will complete graphic organizers to support active reading. We will start by reading narratives together and completing the graphic organizers together for the first few lessons, moving towards students working independently to complete the graphic organizers.

One fun and hands on way I use to keep students engaged while taking notes is to use foldables. Dinah Zike has published many books explaining and describing foldables. The foldables I reference below came from her Big Book of Science,³⁷ but these strategies are applicable in all content areas. As Zike explains in her book, foldables are a quick and easy way to organize information that provides students a sense of ownership. When creating these foldables students will record the questions, title or vocabulary words on the outside of the foldable, and they will record answers, explanations, definitions and other notes on the inside of the foldables.

*Four-Tab or Shutter fold*³⁸

This foldable is best for organizing information into categories and defining vocabulary terms. To create this foldable take a sheet of standard printer paper (bright colors work the best) and hold it lengthwise and fold it in half (this makes a long skinny rectangle). Open the sheet of paper and turn it widthwise and fold it in half (this makes a shorter fatter rectangle). Fold in half again (making a smaller long skinny rectangle). When you open the paper up you should have eight rectangles. Take the top and bottom sections and fold toward the middle (this looks like window shutters), cut the flaps along the fold to the second crease line, this will create a set of four flaps that can be individually opened and closed. On the front of each flap, students will write the key terms or questions, and on the inside, students will record the answers or definitions.

Who – Did – What?

Another graphic organizer that we will use will be to support understanding of the narrative text structure. Students will complete simple organizers to determine “who-did-what,” these organizers will help students identify the main characters, actions and the sequences of events in the stories that we read.³⁹ They will be able clearly evaluate what has occurred in the story and why it was written the way, it was written. These organizers will also serve as a reference source for students when they are creating their presentations at the end of the unit.

For this graphic organizer I plan to use a matchbook fold.⁴⁰ To create this foldable students will take a sheet of paper and fold it long ways (making a long skinny rectangle) folding one side to be wider than the other, creating a lip that can be folded up. Depending on the characters and complexity of the story, students can create one tab for each character. On the front of the foldable students can write the name of the character and then behind that tab describe that character’s role throughout the story.

Another use for this foldable is to focus on the series of events in the story. Students will summarize each event in detail on the inside and use a general statement to describe the events on the outside of the tabs. Categories for the outside of the tabs could be beginning, middle and end, or the parts of a plot. If students are looking at the life of the child before, during and after the war; they can note the changes in the character’s personality, how the child learns to survive, and how this war or conflict affects their fears, dreams and outlook on life after the war on the inside of each tab. Through this examination, students will see the impact war has on a young boy or girl.

Two-Tab book

Students will use two-tab books to organize background information on a given war or conflict. This foldable is a simple way in which students can outline the causes and effects of a war or conflict. Students will also use a two-tab book to explain the view or desired outcomes for each side of a given conflict. To create a two-tab book, students will take one sheet of paper and fold it lengthwise (making a long skinny rectangle). The next step is to take scissor and cut the front flap in half creating the two tabs.⁴¹ Students will write the key categories or labels on the outside of the foldable (ex. causes of World War I, Effects of World War I). The inside of these foldables are where students will take notes from the history presentations, or from reading reference materials such as passages from the encyclopedia or their History books if they are to conduct research on their own.

Emotional Thermometers

Some students struggle to identify the emotions and intensity of the emotions characters have in a story.⁴² This inability to identify the feelings characters have limits the connection a student has with the story. In Sarah Cooper's book, Making History Mine: Meaningful Connections for Grades 5-8,⁴³ she discusses the importance of finding personal connections to strength students understanding. She states in the introduction to her book:

“In teaching, but especially in the identify-forming crucible of middle school, the student is as important as the material; human development parallels academic development. Middle-schoolers focus on themselves, wanting to know how their studies relate to their lives.”

Throughout the unit, I will present students with a personal connection, a link to the common teenager. When discussing the challenges faced by youth throughout history there is the undeniable fact that they are still teenagers. Even in the diary of Ann Frank, there is still common teenage angst. All students can relate to being angry, feeling numb, being scared, feeling relieved or anxious to name a few. By having students identify the emotions the characters in a given story feel, they will make a connection that will further develop their background knowledge. This will help students draw conclusions and make predictions about what choices the character may make.

An emotional thermometer is a simply a scale students can use to rate the emotions of a character.⁴⁴ One way to present these choices to students is to provide them with a few scales to choose from and to rate the emotion of the character during the reading of a given passage. A second use for the thermometer is to track the emotions a given character feels throughout a story on a graph with the intensity of emotions on one axis and time or events in the story on the other. As students rate the emotions of a character, they will need to support their opinion by providing examples or personal connections.

We will use his strategy to evaluate both photographs as we begin the unit and move into the interpretation of text as we read more in depth about characters that fit our main categories of child soldiers. Students will also use these thermometers when we examine the guilt or innocence of the child soldiers. As students make personal connections, they will be able to help explain the actions of a given character because they understand the emotions that the character feels. This skill will also help students identify their own emotions; we will discuss how it can be difficult to control your feelings. Students will keep their emotional thermometer and story summaries in their journals to reference in the creation of their final product.

Studying Propaganda

Students will read, listen and view primary sources representing different opinions from the time of the event. Students will use these primary sources to develop an understanding of why people believed what they believed. In teaching my students about the impacts of propaganda, I will first need to explain to them what propaganda is. There are three general characteristics of propaganda as explained in the article by James Kimble⁴⁵: Institutionalism, mass distribution and multiple iterations. Kimble describes Institutionalism as the method of sharing information. The big three groups connected with Institutionalism are government, religion and corporations. Mass distribution refers to how the institutions share the information with a large audience. Finally he explains how, multiple iterations, or multiple messages, describe the use of strategies such as campaigning over time to share your message. The target audience of a piece of propaganda becomes a part of a greater whole typically displaying qualities of heroism and nobility, and how the opposing views become the undesirable option.⁴⁶

Once students have an understanding of the framework for what propaganda is, we will begin to explore various classic examples of propaganda, as well as in the current media through our examination of more current events. Students will identify similarities and differences in propaganda of the past and present. We will explore the propaganda used to exploit children, and draw them into war. I will begin with visual forms of propaganda (ex. political cartoons, posters, etc.). Once students are able to analyze these forms of propaganda we will move towards verbal and written forms such as speeches, songs, poems, stories, etc. used by the institutions.

Given a piece of propaganda, students will use a quick “snapshot” strategy to recognize what they know and do not know about the primary source using a framework entitled SOAPSTONE. This framework will allow students to determine if the document provides them with the following information: the speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, setting, and tone of the piece. As we move through the unit, students will analyze these pieces and create a list of qualities that all the pieces of propaganda they studied have. We will use these lists to generate a list of common strategies used in propaganda. We will relate these strategies to the methods their own peers may use when pressuring them to join a gang, or make poor choices at both school and in the community.

Digital stories

Digital story telling is a new spin on an old teaching tool. Story telling is the most basic and oldest form of teaching. Storytelling helps students understand the complicated world in which we live.⁴⁷ Story telling keeps students engaged, and enables them to make emotional connections as they analyze characters similar to themselves rather than impersonal facts. By providing links to their prior knowledge and personal experiences, students will better identify the theme and purpose of a piece. This will also support the

development of their ability to make inferences and teach them how to form and support their own opinions.

In this curriculum unit, I will use digital stories to both share information with my students, as well as to have my students share information with the class. Before presenting my students with a written personal narrative of a child soldier, I will provide them with a digital story of a child in a similar situation. For example, I will create a photo essay of a child in Sierra Leone forced to join the military, I will describe the destruction of villages and explain the abduction of youth, explaining how these boys and girls became soldiers in both the army and the rebel groups. Then I will provide students with excerpts of Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.⁴⁸ I will use photo essays to share general information about each category of child soldiers, taking the time to share the personal stories of the mini case studies that help define the categories to my students.

Students will also work in small groups to create a digital story based on one of the narratives that we read for each category. Students will work in small groups to read and evaluate the narrative, and will then work together to create a digital story to share the narrative with the class. This will provide my students with exposure to a variety of stories for each category in an engaging and interactive way. By engaging in this learning practice, students will learn a new method in which they can choose to utilize when creating their final project.

Journals

A major piece of this unit will be student journals. Included in the journal will be all of the information students gathered through many whole group and small group activities. Students will keep their graphic organizers, vocabulary lists, reflections and notes from presentations. During these presentations, I will teach students the context of historical and current events, giving them the "why." I will also provide my students with the necessary mini lessons in reading comprehension, and written expression to support their understanding and ability to express their beliefs, as well as the tools to reflect on the similarities and experiences from their own lives, giving them the "how."

Having students put their thoughts into writing promotes organization, clarification, coherence and higher order thinking.⁴⁹ Some examples of authentic writing assignments, mentioned in Bringing Learning Alive!, beyond essays include dialogues, poetry, letters and stories.⁵⁰ In this unit students have the opportunity to express themselves, daily in their journals through writing prompts and free writing time for reflections and time to make additional personal connections. In this journal, they will be free to create their own stories, poetry, artistic expressions, and lay out plans for digital media presentations such as photo essays, power points, and short movies or public service announcements.

Through their original works, students will be sharing their analysis of stories we studied. Student created pieces will be an expression of the emotions children feel. The final series of original pieces students select to publish will be a unique interpretation of the effect conflicts we studied both current and historical have had on children much like themselves.

Activities

Everything is black and white right?

This is the introductory activity to my unit. It will get students to think about the essential questions of the unit, and spark their interest in learning more about the shades of gray that make up history and the current events around the world. We will begin this activity with a student survey. I will pass out a list of statements to the class: *To throw stones at a soldier, to kill your Grandfather, to go to school, to fight for Democracy and Freedom, to join a Youth group to participate in sports and outdoors activities.* I will read each statement aloud, and students will move to different sides of the classroom based on their opinion. If students believe the statement is the right thing to do they will move to the right side of the classroom, if they believe that it is the wrong thing to do they will move to the left side of the classroom. With the reading of each statement, I will note the tally on the board for the number of students that believed something was right or wrong. Students on each side of the room will talk in groups of three or four to prepare to explain why their group chose to stand where they are standing.

Students will move back to their seats and I will provide them with additional information about each statement. For example, the statement “Killing your grandfather,” for most students, will obviously be the wrong thing to do. However, once I explain to them that in this situation, “You are a child in an African village that has been captured by a rebel army. You are being held at gun point and told to kill your grandfather or you will be killed after they kill him themselves,” some students may change their minds. The entire list of statements will seem to have a clear right or wrong side, but will become less clear when I provide the additional information.

Each student will have an opportunity to change his or her opinion. As students choose to keep or change their opinion, they will be required to explain why. This class discussion will prepare students for the Socratic seminars we will have throughout the unit. We will discuss the shades of gray and continue the discussion on the innocence of these children, and the reactions students have to the discoveries they made throughout the activity. As students discover the ambiguity of assigning right or wrong to these statements it will begin a discussion on the guilt or innocence of these children.

Next, students will split into groups of three or four, each of these groups will examine a series of black and white photos of young soldiers, non-descript kids holding weapons, and youth that are clearly gang members. Each group will take the photos and split them into two groups: “Good guys” and “Bad guys,” and prepare an explanation for their choices. The groups will share their reasons with the class, after all groups have shared, students will move back to their seats, and I will review the photos one by one sharing the story behind the photo. After I share the story, I will ask the class to raise their hands if this changes their opinion. As we did earlier, we will discuss what changes their opinions. Students will have an opportunity to reflect on each photograph in our discussion. After the discussion, I will explain that over the next few weeks we will examine these very questions by learning about different youth throughout history.

To conclude this activity, student will each choose one photograph to take back to their desks. This writing activity will also be the introduction to the emotional thermometers; students will use the thermometer to help them identify the feelings portrayed in the photos. Students will then use the photograph they selected to write a creative story based on the information they learned in our discussion. Students will write what a day in this child’s life might be like; they will describe the feelings and circumstances of the child in their photograph. Students may choose any form of writing to express their perception; they may choose to write a narrative, a poem, a letter or any other form they wish to use. At the end of class, students who wish to share will explain their photograph and share their original creative writing piece.

Defining Roles

This activity is necessary to provide students with an understanding of the four categories in which we will be defining child soldiers. This activity begins with students identifying characteristics of child soldiers based on what they learned yesterday in the introductory activity. I will guide students through questions highlighting circumstances that led to some of the youth we learned about in the above activity. We will write all of the reasons on the board and begin to make groups of similar circumstances. This activity will continue guiding students to the discovery of the four main categories of child soldiers. Students will then create a four square foldable graphic organizer to define the four categories. Students will also add examples from the board of the reasons youth enter war in each category; this will be available for students to reference throughout the unit. This activity ends with students choosing one of the four categories and developing a fictitious character from that category. Students will draw a picture or create a collage using pictures from magazines of this character in their journals and write a brief description of this person. Student descriptions should include information such as how he or she became involved in the war and what war he or she is involved in. Students will explore the emotions of this character as they reflect on how the circumstances may make this

character feel.

Simulating the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

This activity will provide students with the background information on the Israeli Palestinian conflict. First, I will split the class into two groups; one group will be the Israelis and the other will be the Arabs. I will show the students a map of Palestine, and we will designate parts of the classroom to represent different parts of the country. For example, we may designate the window seats to represent the Gaza strip, the front row seats to represent the West Bank, and the group worktable to represent Jerusalem. I will inform students how these are the most desired spaces in the classroom as if they are the most desired parts of Palestine.

We will begin the simulation with the Arab group having the entire classroom as “their land.” Next, a couple of students will enter the classroom as the Zionist Jews in search of a Jewish state. They will “take over” a few desks in the back row. We will discuss how sharing the land affects the Arabs. Many students in the Arab group will most likely express distaste for sharing, but also express little fear or intimidation as they still have most of the land, and the best parts of land.

Next, we will simulate the entrance of additional Jews, both legally and illegally during World War II. Again, they will take more seats but not the best seats in the classroom. We will discuss how this continues to anger the Arabs. I will represent the UN as I step in at the end of the war and divide the land into two territories. We will discuss the feelings on both sides; why the Jews might be happy but the Arabs are not, what do both sides still want, what does the other side have that they want?

Next, I will represent the UN’s second plan and discuss how the major conflict shifts to who has Jerusalem (in this case the table). Students who represent Arabs will lose their seats, now sitting on the floor to represent living in refugee camps, as the Israelis take over the Gaza strip and the West Bank of the Jordan River. Finally, we will simulate the building of the wall and discuss the use of checkpoints for travel in the country. Students will share their feelings and begin to understand why this conflict is so complicated.

The final part of this activity will be a seminar after viewing the Documentary film Promises. The essential question for this seminar will be “Is one side right or wrong in the Palestinian-Israeli crisis?” Students will be guided to think about how prospective impacts views of right or wrong and good or evil. Students will have the stories of all the children interviewed in the documentary to support their opinions.

Discovering the similarities between soldiers and gang members

Once we have studied all four categories, students will be provided with short narratives describing the reasons youth have joined gangs. (Given my class size, only two students will receive the same narrative, but in a larger class, the same narrative could be given to three or four students.) Without providing the students with the context of these narratives, many students may assume that these too are narratives of child soldiers. Each student will create a “who-did- what” foldable for their character, this foldable will be used to help summarize the narrative. Once students complete their summaries, they will share their first impressions with each other and then work together to answer a series of questions: *Which of the four categories we studied would you place this child? Identify the motive this child had for joining. Given your answers to the questions above, and the actions described in the narrative do you believe this child is still innocent? Why or why not? Do you think that this child should face consequences for his actions? Why or why not?*

We will then review all of the narratives together as a class and the small groups will share their answers to the questions with the class. After all groups have shared, I will provide students with the background information on each gang member. We will then discuss student’s reactions to realizing that these were gang members, not soldiers as they may have assumed. We will also discuss the similarities and differences between child soldiers and gang members. Students will then choose one of the narratives to investigate further to create their own digital story independently.

Culminating activity

To tie together all of the stories and wars studied in this unit, students will go back to the beginning where we placed photos into groups for “good guys” and “bad guys.” We will discuss what a victim is and what a villain is. I will ask student if they believe that we can place all of our case studies into these two categories. *Do all child soldiers fit one of these two roles? Does choice play a factor in fitting one of these roles?* Students, after learning the complication and layers of each conflict will undoubtedly say no. We will discuss better categories such as heroes, survivors, activists and aggressors.

The final week of this unit is dedicated to the development of students’ original work. Throughout the unit, students will have collected and created notes, reflections, and a variety of creative writings to express their opinions and reactions to what we have learned. Students will publish a minimum of one product for a child that chooses to be involved and a child forced to be involved. Students may choose child soldiers from any of the wars we discussed in the unit, from the gangs we learned about, or they may choose to research another war with child soldiers. Students are required to publish a minimum of one non-fiction written product, one fiction written product, and one multi-media product such as a power point, photo story or windows movie maker movie.

The purpose of the multi-media presentation is up to the students. For example, students may choose to create a public service announcement used to inform youth like themselves of the conflicts currently affecting youth in various parts of the world. Another option could be to present a poem they found or wrote with pictures of children from the wars we studied to go along with the poem. Students will use a chart to document their choices and plan before they begin working on their projects. Once students have completed their projects, they will present to the class. A rubric, evaluating their research, quality of their products as well as their presentation will serve as the basis for assessing the projects.

Annotated Bibliography for Teacher Resources used in this Curriculum Unit

These books are excellent references for activity ideas and strategies to meet the needs of middle school students.

1. Cooper, Sarah. *Introduction Making History Mine: Meaningful Connections for Grades 5-8* by Sarah Cooper. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009
2. Bowe, Bret, Lobdell, Jim, Owens, Sherry, *Bring Learning Alive!: The TCI Approach for Middle and High School Social Studies*, Palo Alto: Teachers' Curriculum Institute, 2005
3. Zike, Dinah, M.Ed., *Dinah Zike's Big Book of Science: Middle School and High School*, San Antonio, Dinah-Might Adventures, LP, 2001

These article reviews research on reading comprehension and provides suggested teaching methods for improving reading comprehension.

4. Nation, Kate and Angell, Philip, "Learning to Read and Learning to Comprehend" *London Review of Education* (2006): 77-87
5. Gately, Susan E. "Facilitating Reading Comprehension for Students on the Autism Spectrum" *Teaching Exceptional Children* (2008): 40-45

These articles explain the importance and challenges educators face in preparing students for the 21st century.

6. Arkin, Linda "National Interests and Global Security: The case of Iraq. *Occasional Papers.*" *Issues in Global Education* (2002-2003): 2-33
7. Cookson, Peter W. "What would Socrates Say?" *Teaching for the 21st Century* (2009): 8-14

This site explains how to conduct a Socratic Seminars

8. Greece Central School District" *Socratic Seminars: Where Questions, Not Answers, are the Driving Force in Thinking*" Greece Central School District.
<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/SocraticSeminars/overview.htm>

This article is a detailed explanation of what propaganda is.

9. Kimble, James J. "Whither Propaganda? Agonism and "The Engineering Consent" Quarterly Journal of Speech (2005). 201-218

This site has tons of visual propaganda examples used to pull youth into the Nazi movement

10. Calvin.edu, "Gerrman Popoganda War Guide,"
www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/

This article explains the value of using digital storytelling in the classroom.

11. Sadik, Alaa "Digital Storytelling: A Meaningful Technology-Integrated Approach for Engaged Student Learning" Educational Technology Research and Development (2008): 487-506

These articles and sites explain the roles and struggles of child soldiers in Africa. These articles were used to both develop the background knowledge of this paper as well as to provide case studies that can be used in explaining the conflicts through the eyes of a child.

12. Wessells, Michael, "Child Soldiers, Peace Education, and Post-conflict Reconstruction for Peace" Theory Into Practice (2005): 363-369

13. Denov, Myram "Turnings and Epiphanies: Militarization, Life Histories, and the Making and Unmaking of Two Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone" Journal of Youth Studies (2007): 243-361

14. CNN, "Liberia's child soldiers struggle to rebuild lives,"
<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/08/31/liberia.child.soldiers.reut/index.html>

15. Global Issues, "Sierra Leone," <http://www.globalissues.org/article/88/sierra-leone>

This site has links to both written narratives and videos sharing the stories of young men as they fought in the Viet Nam War.

16. PBS, "American Experience: Vietnam Online"
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/>

17. willTV, "Vietnam Soldier Stories," <http://will.illinois.edu/tv/pages/vietnam-soldiers-stories/>

Annotated Bibliography for Teacher/ Student Resources

The book is an oral history of the lives of boys soldiers from WWI, included with the narrative text are letters that the boys sent to their loved ones while in the war, journals, diaries, and newspaper columns.

18. Van Emden, Richard. *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 2005.

The following site has poetry expressing the feelings, hopes, fears and realities of life for soldiers in World War I.

19. BYU.edu, "Poets of the Great War,"
<http://net.lib.byu.edu/english/wwi/poets/poets.html>

This book is a memoir recounting young boy's days in the Hitler Youth. It provides a young man's prospective helping the reader understand the ease with which the youth followed. As the story unfolds, it is easy to see how Heck got to where he got in the Hitler Youth ranks, and how even a young man with a conscience, could be caught up in the evil of Hitler's movement.

20. Heck, Alfons. *A Child of Hitler Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika*. Frederick: Renaissance House, 1985.

This book is a memoir recounting a teenage boy's life before, during and after serving with the government army in Sierra Leone. Beah gives a detailed account of the crimes he committed as a boy soldier as well as his struggles once removed from the fighting

21. Beah, Ishmael, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007

These books will be used to generate photo essays and stories of teenagers in LA caught in the gang warzone. These stories told without the context clues such as locations and gang names will be used to show students the similarities between gangs and child soldiers.

22. Bing, Leon. *Do or Die*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1991

23. Shakur, Sanyika, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member*, New York: Grove Press, 1993

The documentary is an excellent source to show students multiple perspectives on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict without bias. The documentary shows the stories of seven children living near Jerusalem

24. Shapiro, Justine, *Promises*, New York: New Yorker Video, 2001

This Encyclopedia focuses on the role of children in wars throughout history. It is a good source for both teachers and students as the entries read like those of any standard encyclopedia.

25. Sherrow, Victoria, *Encyclopedia of Youth and War: Young People as Participants and Victims* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 2000)

¹Nation, Kate and Angell, Philip, "Learning to Read and Learning to Comprehend" *London Review of Education* (2006): 77-87

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⁵Cooper, Sarah, *Making History Mine: Meaningful Connections for Grades 5-8* Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009

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⁹Wessells, Michael, "Child Soldiers, Peace Education, and Post-conflict Reconstruction for Peace" *Theory Into Practice* (2005): 363-369; Schmidt, Alice, "Volunteer Child Soldiers as Reality: A Development Issue for Africa," *New School Economic Review*, Volume 2(1), (2007): 49-76

¹⁰Sherrow, Victoria, *Encyclopedia of Youth and War: Young People as Participants and Victims* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 2000)

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¹⁵ CNN, "Liberia's child soldiers struggle to rebuild lives," <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/08/31/liberia.child.soldiers.reut/index.html>

¹⁶Sherrow, Victoria, *Encyclopedia of Youth and War: Young People as Participants and Victims* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 2000)

¹⁷Shields, Patricia, “*The Determinants of Service in the Armed Forces During the Viet Nam Era*” Center for Human Resource Research

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³¹Beah, Ishmael, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007

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