

## Children: The Innocent Victims of Adults' Wars

**Overview:** In this lesson students will explore the impact that war has on the world's children. The lesson focuses on two films: *We Don't Want No War* and *Sahar Before the Sun*. Students will conduct research about the impact of war on children, create a presentation, and investigate ways to become involved in helping children affected by war. They will also create a "Peace of Art" to promote peace.

**Grade Level:** 6-12

**Subject Areas:** Language Arts, English, Arts, Geography

### Objectives:

Students will do the following:

- View, analyze and evaluate media
- Participate in class and small-group discussion
- Develop an understanding of the impact of war on children
- Work collaboratively to create a presentation
- Create a piece of art that expresses the concept of peace.

### Media

#### We Don't Want No War – Mohamed Sidibay

#### Iearn Sierra Leone (**Freetown, Sierra Leone**)

In Sierra Leone, Mohamed Sidibay was conscripted, or forced, to be a child soldier during his country's brutal, 10-year civil war. His confused mind still fills with fear for the people he cherished in life – his father, mother, brothers and sisters. Three years later and now 10 years old, Mohamed still trembles at the thought of heavy hands that lay over his shoulder; hands that killed his loved ones, hands that conscripted him. Today, he uses the power of the Internet to help design [www.childsoldiers.org](http://www.childsoldiers.org) and let the world know about his experiences.

#### Sahar Before the Sun – Sahar Adish

#### Light House (**Charlottesville, Virginia**)

Sahar Adish is a senior at Charlottesville High School, applying to colleges, taking standardized tests and preparing for her future. Unlike all of her classmates in this affluent community, she grew up under the Taliban in Kabul, Afghanistan and was home schooled in secret by her mother. Through her experience, she gained a deep appreciation for education coupled with a growing fear that she will not "make it" in America. She views herself as having both a wonderful and terrifying opportunity in America to do something important and meaningful with her life -- first and foremost for her parents and her country.

## **Lesson Sequence**

### **Building Background**

#### Activity One: Places and Spaces

*The purpose of this activity is to provide students with background information that will help them better understand the issues discussed in the film and the lesson activities.*

1. As a class, visit the *Beyond Borders* Countries section of the website. This section contains information about the culture, geography, politics, economics and people of the varied countries that are featured in the *Beyond Borders* films. In this lesson, have your students investigate the following countries:

- Sierra Leone
- Afghanistan

#### Activity Two: Children & War

*The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to begin to think about the impact of war on children.*

1. Read this quotation from a fifteen-year-old girl to your students: "I would like to give you a message. Please do your best to tell the world what is happening to us, the children. So that other children don't have to pass through this violence."
2. Ask students to predict what the person is referring to. After students have made their predictions, share with them that the quote is from a fifteen-year-old female, child soldier who escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.

3. Share the following information from UNICEF's *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* web page.

#### The youngest soldiers

Children are affected by warfare in many ways, but one of the most alarming trends is their participation as soldiers. A series of 24 case studies, prepared for this aspect of the report, indicates that government or rebel armies have recruited tens of thousands of children. Most are adolescent boys, but many are girls, and some recruits are 10 years or younger. Many of these are forcibly recruited, seized from the streets, or even from schools or orphanages. Others are driven to join armed groups by fear or poverty, believing that this is the only way to achieve some protection from the violence around them or to be sure of regular meals, clothing or medical attention.

#### Children in flight

Around the planet there are millions of children who have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees or who have been 'internally displaced' within their own countries. These children are in need of special attention. At a crucial and vulnerable time in their lives, these children are brutally uprooted and exposed to danger and insecurity.

<http://www.unicef.org/graca/> Impact of Armed Conflict on Children

4. Explain to students that they are going to watch two documentaries produced by young people whose lives were turned upside down by war and political unrest in their countries.

### **Media Component**

1. View the film *Sahar Before the Sun* with your students. Give the students the following questions to answer after they have finished.

- How did war impact Sahar and her family's lives?
- What emotion do you think Sahar felt most strongly?
- How has a lack of tolerance impacted Sahar's life?

- What are some of the things that Sahar and her family did to help build a level of security into their lives?
- Sahar talked about how she feels a responsibility to gain knowledge. Do you share the same feeling? Explain.
- Would you “stay or leave” if you were faced with the same situation as Sahar’s family?
- How did this film make you feel?

2. View the film *We Don't Want No War* with your students. Give the students the following questions to answer after they have finished.

- How did war impact Mohamed’s life?
- How does Mohamed’s support structure help him build a level of security into his life?
- What is Mohamed doing to recover from a traumatic situation and move ahead with his life?
- Do you ever worry about war?
- How did this film make you feel?

After the students have finished watching both films, discuss the questions below.

- What did each filmmaker fear?
- What were the commonalities and differences between the filmmakers’ experiences and how they dealt with them?
- Which film did you think was most personally compelling? Why?
- What message do you think each filmmaker was trying to express?

### **Lesson Activities**

Activity One: Children: If We Are the Future, You Better Start Taking  
Better Care of Us

*The purpose of this activity is for students to further investigate issues surrounding the impact of war on children.*

1. Read the following quotation from the United Nation's Secretary General Kofi Annan:

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace."

2. Discuss Kofi Annan's quotation, as it relates to the films, with the class. Explain that they are going to conduct research on how war impacts today's youth. After completing the research, they will create a presentation to teach their fellow classmates about the topic they researched. They will also decide upon an action(s) that they can take to help eliminate fear from children's lives and create a more secure environment for the world's children.

3. Divide the class into small groups and assign the groups one of the two topics listed below. Ask the groups to investigate the resources listed in their assigned area.

Child Soldiers Groups

<http://www.childsoldiers.org>

[\*\*UNICEF's Child Soldiers Site\*\*](#)

<http://www.unicef.org/protection/childsoldiers.pdf>

[BBC: Children of Conflict](#)

[Amnesty International: Child Soldiers](#)

[IRIN: Child Soldiers](#)

Refugees Groups

[UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency](#)

[Amnesty International: Refugees have Rights](#)

[UN: Children in Flight](#)

[Human Rights Watch: Refugees](#)

[UNICEF's Real Lives Afghanistan's Former Child Soldiers](#)

[BBC: The Road to Refuge](#)

[Refugees International](#)

2. After the students have finished their research, ask each group to prepare a presentation that will teach their classmates about what they learned. The following is a list of suggestions of possible formats for students' presentations:

- Create a PowerPoint presentation
- Perform a skit
- Create a quiz (Students may use UNICEF's [Child Labour Quiz](#) as an example.)
- Create and videotape a news program
- Create an information poster
- Create and record a radio news program
- Create a website

3. Ask each group to present its project to the entire class. Provide time for discussion, questions, and feedback.

4. Get Involved. After everyone has completed their presentations, have students return to their groups and research ways that they can become involved and make a difference. Ask students to present their ideas to the class. Provide time for students to follow through on their ideas. Students may decide to educate and engage the entire school population and/or the local community in their efforts. The following websites provide a starting place for this activity:

[Youth Ambassadors for Peace](#)

[Let the Children Live in Peace](#)

[UNHCR: How You Can Help](#)

[Refugees International: Ways You Can Help](#)

[Act Now For Refugees](#)

### Activity Two: Peace Art

*In this lesson students will select peace quotes, poems or a peace hero and incorporate their choice into a piece of art.*

1. Share and discuss these peace quotes with your students.

I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than our governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969)

Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.

The XIVth Dalai Lama

2. Send students to the *Waging Peace* website to read peace quotes, poems, and information about peace heroes. Tell students to select a quote, poem, or a peace hero and incorporate it into a work of art.

[Waging Peace: Peace Quotes](#)

[Waging Peace: Peace Poems](#)

[Waging Peace: Peace Portraits](#)

3. The following is a list of suggested mediums for the project, but students should feel free to use a medium of their own choosing for the project: collage, sculpture, drawing/painting, photography, or fabric.

4. After students finish their project, celebrate with a peace party where students will have an opportunity to share and explain their pieces.

### **Extension Activities**

#### Activity One: Visual Representation of Child Soldiers

1. Create a visual representation of the impact of war on children in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Using the provided template (or creating one of your own), copy and cut out an image for each child soldier in Sierra Leone and/or Afghanistan. Hang the child soldier images on the walls around the school. Write an explanation of the project including information about child soldiers and display it near the soldier images.

Statistics: UNICEF estimates that more than 5,000 children under the age of 18, both boys and girls and some as young as five, have fought as combatants in Sierra Leone's internal armed conflict. \*

A survey undertaken by UNICEF and partners in 2003, estimated that there are 8,000 former child soldiers in Afghanistan.

Teacher Note: In a study, the United Nations estimates that there are about 300,000 child soldiers worldwide. You are more than welcome to attempt the daunting task of hanging 300,000 child soldier templates to represent child soldiers worldwide.

\*These are the figures provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) but they are estimates; the real figures may be much higher. The Special Representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, after a visit to Sierra Leone, said on 9 September 1999 that "*more than 10,000 children have been serving as child soldiers in various fighting groups.*"

#### Activity Two: Investigating Child Workers

1. Invite students to further their knowledge of the world's children by investigating child workers.

2. Ask the students to begin by taking UNICEF's Child Labour Quiz.

## [UNICEF: Child Labour Quiz](#)

3. Information about child labor may be found on the following sites:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights/childrenofconflict/work.shtml>

[http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)

<http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/drawingboard/digest/0505/fattore.html>

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/ecuador/ecuad0402-01.htm>

4. Have the students share what they have learned with their classmates.

5. The websites listed below contain information on ways to get involved. Encourage students to get involved.

[International Labour Organization](#)

[ICFTU: Stop Child Labour](#)

[Rugmark: Help Change a Small Part of the World](#)

## **Standards**

### **Mid-continent Research for Education & Learning**

[www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

#### Language Arts

Writing

**Standard 4.** [Gathers and uses information for research purposes](#)

#### **Level IV (Grades 9-12)**

2. Uses a variety of print and electronic sources to gather information for research topics (e.g., news sources such as magazines, radio, television, newspapers; government publications; microfiche; telephone information services; databases; field studies; speeches; technical documents; periodicals; Internet)

6. Uses strategies to adapt writing for different purposes (e.g., to explain, inform, analyze, entertain, reflect, persuade)

Reading

**Standard 7.** [Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts](#)

**Level III (Grades 6-8)**

1. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., textbooks; biographical sketches; letters; diaries; directions; procedures; magazines; essays; primary source historical documents; editorials; news stories; periodicals; bus routes; catalogs; technical directions; consumer, workplace, and public documents)

**Level IV (Grades 9-12)**

1. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., textbooks, biographical sketches, letters, diaries, directions, procedures, magazines, essays, primary source historical documents, editorials, news stories, periodicals, catalogs, job-related materials, schedules, speeches, memoranda, public documents, maps)

Arts Connections

**Standard 1.** Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines  
<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/topicsDetail.asp?topicsID=341&subjectID=9>

Visual Arts

**Standard 1.** [Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts](#)

**Level III [Grade: 5-8]**

1. Understands what makes different art media, techniques, and processes effective (or ineffective) in communicating various ideas

**Level IV [Grade: 9-12]**

2. Understands how the communication of ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes one uses

## Geography

**Standard 4.** [Understands the physical and human characteristics of place](#)

**Level IV (Grades 9-12)**

1. Knows how social, cultural, and economic processes shape the features of places (e.g., resource use, belief systems, modes of transportation and communication; major technological changes such as the agricultural and industrial revolutions; population growth and urbanization)

## Working With Others

**Standard 1.** [Contributes to the overall effort of a group](#)

**Level IV (Grades K-12)**

2. Works cooperatively within a group to complete tasks, achieve goals, and solve problems