



Amnesty International

CHILD SOLDIERS

A human rights education resource on child soldiers, based on a talk by a former child soldier, Ishmael Beah. For use with young people aged 11-14 in Citizenship, PSHE, PSE, English or Art.

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Ishmael Beah's book *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* tells the story of his life in Sierra Leone as a child soldier. He tells how, at the age of 12, he fled from attacking rebels. He describes how his homeland became unrecognisable through violence. By 13, he had been picked up by the government army and under its coercive tactics, including the use of drugs, he found himself capable of committing terrible acts. When he was 15 he was taken to a UNICEF rehabilitation centre for child soldiers in Freetown. He discovered that almost all family had been killed in the conflict. When he was 16 the civil war hit Freetown. Ishmael Beah fled as a refugee to Guinea and eventually to the United States, where an American family adopted him. His story illustrates the atrocities of war and its impact on children, especially child soldiers.



In January 2008 Ishmael Beah spoke to local school students at Amnesty International's Human Rights Action Centre in London about his life and book. Afterwards, the students questioned him about his experiences.

The lesson plan

This lesson plan uses Ishmael Beah's first hand account of life as a child soldier to encourage pupils to expand their understanding beyond themselves: to think globally and to think about human rights. It is designed for use with film clips from Ishmael Beah's session at the Human Rights Action Centre.
www.amnesty.org.uk/childsoldier

The lesson plan is for use with young people aged between 11 and 14, but it may be possible to adapt some activities to an older age group.

The activities can be used in a stand-alone lesson in Citizenship, PSHE, PSE or in an interdisciplinary project in English or Art to encourage students to make connections between different areas of learning. The activities enable young people to learn independently and as part of a group, and to apply their learning in new contexts.

Extension activities, which can be used as homework, or in additional lessons, are presented to allow students to develop independent study skills and their knowledge of the subject.

Learning objectives

To give students:

- empathy with issues facing children who are engaged in war
- empathy with children who have fled their homes owing to war
- awareness of the impact of war on children
- an introduction to human rights

Sensitivity

The lesson has been designed for use with children who have not been affected by war. Some of the issues raised in the lesson, and the talk by Ishmael Beah, may evoke traumatic responses from children who have been affected by war, or who have had to seek asylum. Teachers should be aware of the difficult emotions this lesson may arouse in such children.

Resources

For the main lesson, you will need:

- a world map
- film clips of Ishmael Beah: *Ishmael's story*, *Child soldiers in war* and Pictures of his past.

For Extension Activity 1 you will need copies of Activity Sheets 1 and 2 – one of each for each student or group of students.

For Extension Activity 2 you will need copies of Activity Sheet 3 – one for each student or group of students.



Further information

www.child-soldiers.org

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers website with up-to-date information, statistics and actions

www.alongwaygone.com/

Website promoting Ishmael Beah's book, *A Long Way Gone*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K4yhPSQEzo

An interview with Ishmael Beah

**Activity 1
(5 minutes)****WAR AND CHILDREN**

Aim: To introduce the existence of child soldiers and its extent worldwide

Ask the class what they think about when they hear the word WAR. Write their suggestions on the board. They may say: guns, violence, death, soldiers, armies, tanks, bombs, killing. If they do not contribute the words 'child soldiers', prompt them to do so.

Emphasise that we may not think of child soldiers, because they are not part of the usual imagery we receive about war through films or the media. Explain that an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 child soldiers are engaged in conflict at present, in 19 countries worldwide. These children live in very difficult and disturbing conditions, and are often trained to kill and maim from the age of 12.

Using a world map and the information given in the Facts and Figures sheet, identify the countries where children are engaged as soldiers.

Tell the class that in this lesson they will be looking at what being a child soldier means from the perspective of one former child soldier. Ishmael Beah was a child soldier in Sierra Leone and he has written a book about his experiences. Warn them that because of the nature of his experiences, they may find some of the facts disturbing or upsetting.

**Activity 2
(10 minutes)****ISHMAEL'S STORY: EXPERIENCES OF WAR**

Aim: To gain an understanding of the real experiences of being a child soldier

Tell the class they will be watching Ishmael Beah talking about his early experiences of being a child soldier.

Play Clip 1: *Ishmael's story*.

Check with the class for initial reactions, and clear any initial questions.

Ask students, in small groups, to come up with a list of words that explain what Ishmael Beah has 'lost' through the war. The groups pool their suggestions. Record their words on the board. Ask how these experiences might have affected him and other child soldiers.

Ask the students if they think it is fair that children are used in war. Tell them that there are international laws and conventions that should protect children in war, but that in many instances these are ignored by governments.

Activity 3 (15 minutes)

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Aim: To gain an insight into the reasons why children are used in war



Ask the students, working in pairs, to think about why children are so commonly used in war, and to record their ideas on a piece of paper. After five minutes tell them they will be watching another clip of Ishmael Beah where he answers this question.

Play Clip 2: *Child soldiers in war*.

After listening to the clip, check and clear any questions.

Ask the students to look at their list of words. Did Ishmael Beah mention any of these reasons? Remind the students that child soldiers are often recruited to fight in wars because they can easily be manipulated, may be vulnerable and have few choices.

Activity 4 (20 minutes)

CONSEQUENCES OF WAR: FLEEING

Aim: To explore the impact of being a refugee child soldier

Tell the students they will be watching one final clip, which shows Ishmael Beah talking about one of the consequences of being a refugee and victim of war.

Play Clip 3: Pictures of his past.

Check the emotions of the students and clear any questions.

Ask the students if they can imagine what it must be like leaving all their belongings behind them as they flee their home. Ask them how they might feel having nothing that reminds them of their family or community.

Ask the students to imagine that they had to flee their home. Give them a few moments to think about this. Ask them to think of one thing they would like to take with them. Invite them to draw a picture of this item, and if they wish, to write a description of it below the picture.

Invite the students to display their pictures, and look at each other's work.

Activity 5 (5 minutes)

Aim: To draw the lesson to a close

Ask students for their reactions to the lesson. Review the main learning points.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Extension Activity 1

Hand out Activity Sheets 1 and 2. Ask students to read the passage independently, in pairs or in small groups and answer the questions.

Extension Activity 2

After listening to Ishmael Beah's experiences of war (Ishmael's story), and looking at the pictures on Activity Sheet 3, ask students to imagine that they are one of the child soldiers in Sierra Leone who has drawn one of these pictures. Tell them to write a diary for the day about which this picture was drawn.

Extension Activity 3

Ask students to research one of the countries where armed conflict is currently taking place and where child soldiers are involved in the fighting.

Extension Activity 4

Ishmael Beah was born and lived in Sierra Leone. The civil war in Sierra Leone is now over. Ask students to use the internet to research the war in Sierra Leone, documenting why and how it started, its impact and the situation in the country at the moment.

ACTIVITY SHEET 1

CHILD SOLDIERS



Child soldiers are young people under 18, who fight in wars. It is impossible to know exactly how many child soldiers there are in the world, but experts suggest that there are between 250,000 and 300,000.

Research has shown that child soldiers have been used in armed conflict between 2004 and 2007 in: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand and Uganda.

Children become soldiers for many different reasons. Sometimes they are forcibly recruited: they might be taken out of their schools or away from their villages. Others may join voluntarily, because they see the army as a 'safe place'. Some children join so that they will receive food, clothing and shelter. When a young person's family and friends are involved in the conflict, or have been killed, fighting can seem attractive.

Fighting has big effects on children. They can be wounded and permanently disabled, physically and psychologically. Witnessing violence can also be very traumatic. Child soldiers may suffer permanent psychological damage and need a lot of counselling and support after the conflict ends.

Questions

1. On a blank map of the world (Activity Sheet 2), find, label and colour in all the countries that are mentioned in this article where child soldiers have been involved in conflict recently.
2. Why might children voluntarily join up to become soldiers? Write down any other examples you can think of, that are not mentioned in the article.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

ACTIVITY SHEET 2 CHILD SOLDIERS AROUND THE WORLD



EXTENSION ACTIVITY SHEET 3

DRAWINGS BY CHILD SOLDIERS



Here are some pictures that were actually drawn by children in Sierra Leone to illustrate their experiences when they were child soldiers. Imagine that you were one of the children who drew one of these pictures. Write a diary of what happened to you on that day. Explain your picture. What are you thinking?



STUDENT WORKSHEET

EXTENSION ACTIVITY SHEET 3 CONTINUED DRAWINGS BY CHILD SOLDIERS



FACTS AND FIGURES



Definition of child soldiers

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers considers a child soldier ‘any person under the age of 18 who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or armed political group, whether or not an armed conflict exists’.

Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including participation in combat, laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labour; and sexual slavery or other recruitment for sexual purposes.

The number of child soldiers globally

Although it is impossible to accurately calculate the number of children involved in armed forces and groups, it is clear that there are many tens of thousands of child soldiers. They exist wherever there is armed conflict and their numbers fluctuate constantly. The United Nations estimates that there are 250,000-300,000 child soldiers.

(http://www.un.org/works/goington/soldiers/goington_soldiers.html)

Geographical spread of child soldiers

While thousands of child soldiers have come out of fighting forces in the last five years as wars ended in countries such as Liberia, Angola and Sierra Leone, thousands more have been drawn into new conflicts, for example in Somalia, Sudan and Chad.

Between 2004 and 2007 child soldiers were involved in armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand and Uganda.

Why become a child soldier?

Most child soldiers are aged between 14 and 18. While many enlist ‘voluntarily’, research shows that such adolescents see few alternatives to involvement in armed conflict. Some enlist as a means of survival in war-torn regions after family, social and economic structures collapse, or after seeing family members tortured or killed by government forces or armed groups. Others join up because of poverty and lack of work or educational opportunities. Many girls have reported enlisting to escape domestic servitude, violence and sexual abuse.

Forcible abductions, sometimes of large numbers of children, continue to occur in some countries. Children as young as nine have been abducted and used in combat.

Girl soldiers

There is growing recognition of girls’ involvement in armed conflict. Girl soldiers are frequently subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence as well as being involved in combat and other roles. In some cases their communities stigmatise them when they return home. Often girl soldiers are excluded from programmes for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration for child soldiers.

What protection is there?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that lays down the rights of all children. It has been signed and ratified by almost every country in the world. (When a state signs and ratifies a human rights Convention, it agrees to be legally bound by it.)



Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children under 15 years of age are not to be recruited into the armed forces and are not to take a direct part in hostilities.

Optional protocols

Since the Convention was written, two Optional Protocols have been added. The UN General Assembly adopted these on 25 May 2000 and governments can decide whether to sign and be bound by them. One of these Optional Protocols set 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in fighting.

The United Kingdom has ratified this Optional Protocol, but says that it will still send soldiers under the age of 18 into war zones in certain conditions. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and other children's rights groups say that this means the UK is failing to deliver fully on the promises it made when it agreed to the Protocol.

Campaign organisation

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was formed in May 1998 by leading international human rights and humanitarian organisations.

The Coalition's International Steering Committee member organisations are: Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva. It maintains active links with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Labour Organisation.

The Coalition's goal is to promote adoption of and adherence to national, regional and international legal standards (including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict) prohibiting the military recruitment and use in hostilities of any person younger than 18 years of age. It promotes the recognition and enforcement of this standard by all armed groups, both governmental and non-governmental.

Much of the information in this factsheet came from the coalition (www.child-soldiers.org).

'I would like you to give 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.'

A 15-year-old girl, speaking to Amnesty International in Uganda. She was forcibly abducted at night from her home by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an armed opposition movement fighting the Ugandan government. She was made to kill a boy who tried to escape. She saw another boy being hacked to death for not raising the alarm when a friend ran away. She was beaten when she dropped a water container and ran for cover under gunfire. She received 35 days of military training and was sent to fight the government army.