

WAR AND PEACE IN OUR TIME AN EXPLORATION OF THE CULTURE OF PEACE AND THE CULTURE OF WAR

by

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"War begins in the minds of human beings. Since this is so, the minds of human beings must also be capable of ending war". The constitution of UNESCO begins with this statement. UNESCO has declared the first decade of the 21st Century to be the decade to create a Culture of Peace. What is meant by a "Culture of Peace"? How can it be created?

In this article we will explore what it means to go to war, look at the consequence of using violent means to achieve peace or justice, question if war is ever justifiable and try to determine what peace and justice mean in a post 9/11 era. We will explore how teachers can create a classroom climate for discussion that invites a constructive dialogue (not a competitive debate) about the rationale, the necessity, or the absurdity and immorality of war and violence in our times - a dialogue about the alternatives that do exist and the choices human beings can make. We say constructive dialogue because we believe it is only by this means that negotiations can proceed and resolutions be found for critical hotspots around the world and a lasting peace be achieved.

Challenging students to engage in such dialogue is the first step in creating a culture of peace. In order to bring this question home we first asked each other: How far would we go, we personally, Carol and Noa, to defend our families, and ourselves if we were personally attacked? Suppose a person came storming through the door while we were sitting, drinking coffee, engaged in conversation, going about our business, harming no one.

Suppose that person began setting things on fire and threatening us with a gun. What would we do? Would we plead? Would we run? Would we attempt to threaten or overwhelm or possibly kill that person with a kitchen knife or other weapon if nothing else succeeded?

Yes, we decided, we would defend ourselves, our families - definitely, - and yes we would use violence if all else failed. We would do this - even as we both continuously teach about non-violence and peaceful means to resolve conflicts. Is it then not also consistent to say that the same reaction is justified for a society and a nation to go to war, to use violence to defend themselves? This issue is at the basis of the debate that is thousands of years old: - Is there such a thing as a just war? Is it justifiable to defend yourself, to preserve your life when you are attacked, to preserve the lives of your family, to protect your culture, your beliefs?

Now, let us explore a significantly different situation. What were the reasons that motivated the terrorist attacks of 9/11? From our perspective we see only an act of unjustified aggression. From the perspective of the aggressors, we are told, they believed and they perceived that the United States was the aggressor and that the act was justified because they were only defending their belief systems and their culture. How can that be? Constructive dialogue about the difference in these perceptions can help students come to understand the basis of the culture of war and the concepts of self-sacrifice and heroism that are associated with it in many cultures both currently and historically.

We live in a continuum of parallel worlds. We know what the culture of war entails and we know what the culture of peace entails. No matter what our persuasion or belief system is, no matter who we are in this world - Pakistanis or Indians, Palestinians or Israelis, Christians or Muslims or Jews - all peoples have a notion of the characteristics and consequences of the culture of peace and the culture of war. Yet between us there seem to be significant differences in the perception or interpretation of these characteristics and consequences.

What are these differences? How can we create a culture of peace? What would it take to create a climate for constructive dialogue with peoples everywhere that would build an enduring culture of peace in our time? How can we overcome a historically determined culture that accepts war and glorifies violence and self-sacrifice? How can we move humankind toward a mindset that will not allow violence toward people and nations under any

circumstance - a mindset that will only accept non-violent methods of conflict resolution? The irony is that all human beings do want peace - and yet an ideology or a belief can be so strong that it drives them to engage in war.

Suggested Classroom Activities to Initiate Constructive Dialogue Regarding War and Peace

1. Divide the class into several groups of no more than five students per group. Ask half of the groups to make a list of what the culture of war entails and the other half to make a list of characteristics included in the culture of peace. A good beginning list might include:

The culture of war includes:

- * Use of violent means to battle for an idea or ideology (such as for or against Communism), religious beliefs, nationalism, power, expansion, resources, injustice.
- * Competition, - win-lose mentality
- * Personal sacrifice
- * Enthusiasm for battle
- * Agreement that violence is OK to achieve a desired end
- * Military Service
- * Modern technology - warfare and weapons
- * Glorification of dying for one's country
- * Minimizing loss of life

The culture of Peace includes:

- * Cooperation
- * Inclusion
- * Negotiation, mediation
- * Conflict Resolution through dialogue
- * Diplomacy
- * Win-win mentality
- * Sanctity and dignity of all human beings
- * Sanctions, blockades
- * Institutions of Peace
- * Conflict Resolution Education and Training
- * Constructive, non-military service to country
- * Justice
- * Respect for persons opposed to war and who refuse to engage in war

2. Ask students to develop a collage (alone or in groups) of a culture of peace or a culture of war.
3. Research and develop a paper or oral presentation on what different religions have to say about war and peace. What did Jesus say about violence and war? What does the Old Testament say about violence and war? What does the Koran say about violence and war?
4. Explore the number of peace groups in a country and describe what they do. Evaluate their success.
5. Each time the curriculum includes the study of a particular war initiate class or small group discussion of the causes and POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES to all wars throughout history. How could this war have been avoided? Was it inevitable? What were the consequences of going to war? What might have been the consequences of not going to war? Did the peace treaty resolve the conflict? Was the peace treaty just to all parties? Possible alternatives to war might include economic sanctions, a blockade, an agreement to a non-aggression pact, negotiation, mediation, punishment of individuals rather than a nation.
6. Investigate the impact of International Organizations and the role they play in international conflict resolution, peace negotiation and eradicating the underlying causes of violence and war.
7. Research the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Evaluate the impact and degree of success of their non-violent responses to conflict and violence. Answer the question Can non-violent movements be successful? What examples do exist?
8. *Research how violence and war are interpreted or perceived by different people and cultures.*
9. Through constructive controversy, class dialogue, small group discussion, or written response (position paper) ask students to develop answers to the following questions:
 - a. What is the difference between a soldier who goes to war and a suicide bomber or a kamikaze fighter?

- b. Is there a difference in gender feeling and opinions in regard to war and peace? Give examples or rationale for responses.
- c. Is it realistic to think that all countries could abolish their armies?
- d. What needs to happen to abolish war?
- e. Is it always defensible or acceptable or part of human nature to defend yourself or you nation?
- f. Is it acceptable to attack another person for any other reason than self-defense?
- g. Is it essential to always first explore peaceful means in resolving conflict and violence?
- h. Is justice an important pre condition for peace?
- i. What role does hunger and poverty and lack of education and resources play in international/national violence and war?

It is our belief that time spent in researching and discussing the issues of war and peace, the culture of war and the culture of peace, and the characteristics and consequences of each is essential if a lasting peace is ever to be achieved. It will help students shape their thoughts and think deeply about whether the costs, the pain, the suffering, and the destruction that violence and war create can ever be justified. It may begin the process of changing a culture which allows - even promotes - war and violence to a culture of peace which will end violence and war for all time for all people. What better place for this to begin than in the classroom?

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