saying no to violence

children and peace

HRE/HRP/6R/8

ACTIVITIES FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

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peace pledge union
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This publication is supplemented by specially produced and selected material on the PPU web site, www.ppu.org.uk/sno.html. The organisation of material on the web site follows the pattern of this book. Section 1 consists mainly of resources for parents and teachers, Section 2 is for children. Contributions from children, teachers and parents to this web site are welcomed.

the trouble with violence

We thought he was behaving a little oddly, as we watched him from the car while waiting for the traffic lights to change. From the strangely uncoordinated purposefulness of his actions, we guessed that perhaps the old man was somebody we 'care for in the community'. Harmlessly, pointlessly, and hilariously, he was waving the traffic along.

Standing next to him was a youth waiting to cross the road, with that theatrical 'what is going on here' attitude you often see nowadays. Suddenly he sprang into action: feet flying in the air, he kick-boxed the hapless car-waver in the back and brought him to the ground.

We can burden an incident like this with more significance than it can bear, but one thing is certain: kick-boxing that harmless old man did not come 'naturally'. That feet-flying movement is a stereotypic image from violence-as-entertainment, travelling all the way from cartoons to action films and computer games. If we're looking for evidence of a link between cause and effect, here it is.

The lights changed; the youth crossed the road without looking back; the old man picked himself up and started to wave the traffic on once more. It was the very day on which the United States, with the British government's support, fired cruise missiles at Iraq to teach Saddam Hussain a lesson he seemed reluctant to learn.

After the most violent century in human history, we are still a long way from changing the social habits and institutions – and the habits of mind – which promote violence. We seem to be so deeply attached to its representation that we can't give it up. And, despite volumes of evidence to the contrary, we cling to our belief in its efficacy, whether it's a clip over the ear or a laser-guided precision bomb.

According to a recent Government consultation paper almost 50% supported the view that smacking children is a good way to improve their behaviour. Add to them all the people who occasionally smack children despite their best intentions – and a powerful system is in place for 'teaching' the future generation, almost from birth, that violence is acceptable. If 'violence' seems too strong a term for a smack, asking a small child what it feels like will quickly reveal the appropriateness of the word. The Archbishop of Canterbury has approved what he termed a 'loving smack': demonstrating the linguistic and ideological contortions necessary to justify violence even at this relatively modest level.

At the same time, concern about violence in schools has been growing. Acts of violence which were rare a few years ago are now commonplace. Violence now enters into children's lives from a multitude of sources, damaging their understanding of how people can and should respond to each other. In this changed environment fewer

contents

'we educators share the responsibility for conveying the culture of war from one generation to another, for keeping its practices alive and for all too blindly following misguided instructions.'

Fred Van Leeuwen, Secretary General of Education International representing 350 national teachers' unions worldwide, speaking at the launch of the International Year for a Culture of Peace, October 1999.

and fewer children are developing the skills they need to live together in peace and to solve problems in co-operative and non-violent ways.

A lot of good and imaginative work is being done to tackle some of these problems; but at present this mostly takes place at secondary level. In fact, children start to learn about conflict at a much earlier age; it's in the first years of a child's life that the foundations of future behaviour are established. In today's world this fact presents parents and teachers with an enormous challenge.

Few, indeed, are equipped to counteract the violence, real or represented, to which many children are subjected even from infancy; or to challenge the violent role models which undermine development of positive social skills. There are, of course, no easy answers to these problems and each of us must approach them in ways that suit us and the children in our care.

In the pages that follow, we identify and critically examine some of the issues. We outline courses of action. We provide accounts of first-hand experience, and in response offer some suggestions, both practical and utopian; we hope they will provide a link of solidarity and support in those times when things seem too much.

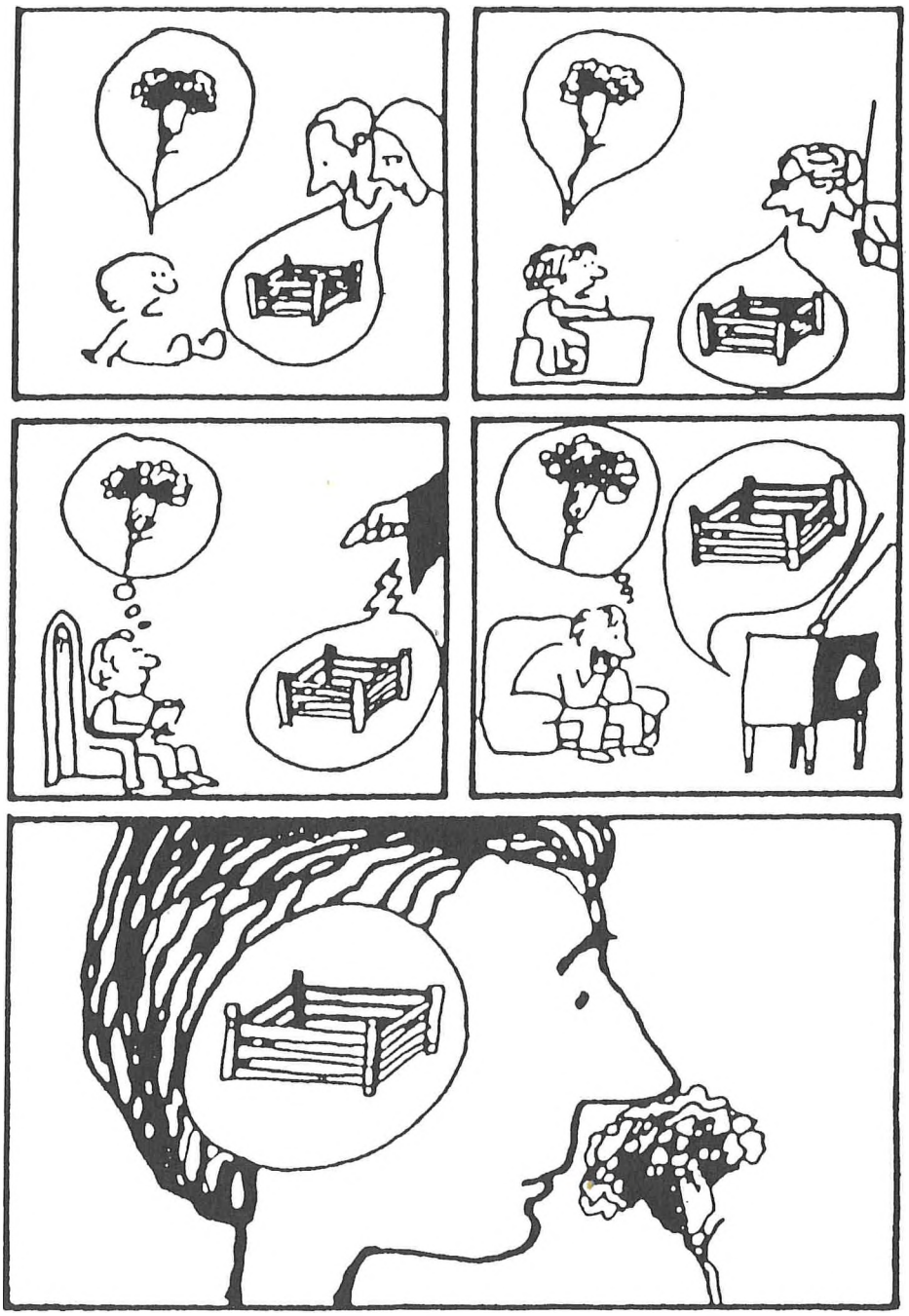
While children are the focus of this book, it is equally concerned with adults. We cannot place the whole burden of making the world a better place on our children – it must be a joint project. Nor can we expect children to take us seriously if we ask them to behave in ways which we're not prepared to try ourselves. Children learn at least as much from our behaviour as from our instructions – very probably much more.

And it's not only our behaviour in the private sphere that's important. The world beyond the front door or the school gate affects us – and we in return can affect that world. Whether our children grow up to be active participants in society, or passive consumers, is influenced by how actively we adults engage with the wider world.

Challenging and changing the social, political and commercial factors which create a diet of violence for children is an essential prerequisite for a better world. It makes sense for our children, it makes sense for us, and it makes sense for all our fellow human beings around the world. Think globally, think nonviolently.

Donal McAuley

the future – too important to be left to chance



'It is heartening to note that television programmes which show pro-social modes of co-operation and conflict resolution have demonstrable outcomes in increased pro-social behaviour in children.'

'Young people who believe the myth that war is intrinsic to human nature are less likely to believe they can do anything for peace.'

'The future does not exist. There is only the present, but within this present, there exists the idea that we have of the future. And there are also within the present, the attitudes, behaviour patterns and habits that constitute both our history and institutions. The future is therefore not something to be discovered, like an existing terra incognita.

The future is to be created, and before being created, it must be conceived, it must be invented and finally willed....'

aggressive, me?

'I would try to stop wars by bombers dropping bombs on bomb factories'
Andrew, 9

'Change is a risky business and many people prefer not to take the risk. Change means admitting you may be wrong; change means forgiving and forgetting; change means living with greater insecurity and uncertainty. That is why most people refuse to reflect upon themselves and their lives but instead insist that they are right and others wrong. Sadly an inability to see alternatives is regarded as a virtue and admired as a strength.'

caring

If you are reading this it's very likely that you're concerned about peace and justice, and that you believe we can all contribute somehow to making the world a safer and fairer place. It's likely that you have young children, or work with them, and that you want to help them grow up to be actively caring adults like yourself. At the same time, you may be wondering how all this can be achieved.

Cartoon characters continue to bash away at each other, computer game idols go on reaching for their guns. Bullies still corner their victims in the playground, parents still slap their fractious children in the supermarket. Football supporters eagerly square up for gang battles, while governments recite the virtues of bombing people to bring about 'peace'. It's hard not to form the view that violence is a natural and inescapable part of life.

There is another view. Every day, anywhere, people are behaving in selfless ways. They volunteer help and assistance. They give money, or help raise funds, where they cannot help directly. They work at home or abroad, for little reward, on behalf of people less fortunate than themselves. You'll have been unselfish and generous yourself, and you know people who've done the same. So perhaps altruism is a natural part of life as well.

Haunting images often visit us on our television screens, giving intimate glimpses of the latest international way to link violence with kindliness: 'humanitarian war'. The camera pans over a wagon full of refugees and halts, as if fixed by it, on a child's tear-stained face. The child seems to gaze directly at us – a fleeting contact across time and space, an accidental conjunction of eyes and lens, a moment of imagined communication. Big glistening eyes have a powerful ability to stimulate emotion. Our sympathy overflows and our own eyes fill. But where the refugee child is crying, the television viewer's triggered response has no reality, meaning or effect. Unless, that is, conscious, constructive, and sustained action for peace is triggered as well.

biology

Once it was the devil and the forces of evil that were blamed for anti-social behaviour – an idea which hasn't entirely disappeared. In our modern, 'scientific' age, much of the blame is placed on our genes. Aggression is innate, so the popular view goes: wars and their consequences are inevitable. We just can't help it.

Those who claim that human beings are by nature violent and selfish often try to present the aggressive behaviour of animals as evidence, ignoring the many examples of animal co-operation. Scientists may say that there are genes for specific behaviour, such as aggression, but the (non-aggressive) biological context in which such a gene may function is not always fully explained. The media often distort or misreport alleged scientific findings, and scientists themselves may have reasons (securing funding for specialist studies, for example) not to act immediately to extend the public's restricted view.

The bleak image of ourselves as helpless victims in the power of our genes is dangerous. For a start, it's a too-convenient way to avoid responsibility. Worse, by endorsing the existence of an 'aggressive instinct', it leads us logically to endorse aggressive action. To be convinced that aggression is 'natural' (as if this also meant 'right') may have more sinister consequences than any single aggressive act. Not least, it leads to thinking that war is 'necessary', even if only as a last resort. As long as that belief holds, there will be arms manufacturers, arms races, and insufficient will to settle con-

flicts by negotiation. As long as there are arms traders, competitive arsenal-builders, and leaders reluctant to consider compromise, the conditions which make wars possible will persist.

It has to be better than this. And it can. Of course our biological structure contributes to what we are and do. But we are also self-motivating individuals with the responsibility and ability to do things differently. At the very least, an aggressive impulse doesn't have to be realised in an aggressive act. Our biological lives extend into social constructs of culture and language; it's through these that we pass on the 'genes' of attitude and behaviour. Our understanding of our societies, and our interaction with them, may be affected by our human 'nature', but need not be controlled by it: we really can learn to make different choices. There's plenty of evidence in human history to show that we've done it before.

Of course we haven't always made constructive choices. But it's growing increasingly hard to see how violence and war can make a helpful contribution to the survival of our species. The idea that peace might be more species-friendly is, as it happens, beginning to catch on at last. Relieved, by a mental leap, of the straitjacket of aggressive instincts and aggression genes, we can change the world. Utopian, maybe. Impossible, certainly not.

'The world cannot just be explained, it must be grasped and understood as well. It is not enough to impose one's own words on it, but one must listen to the polyphony of often contradictory messages that the world sends out and try and penetrate their meaning. It is not enough to describe, in scientific terms, the mechanics of things and events; their spirit must be personally perceived and experienced. One cannot merely follow the timetable we have set for our influence on the world; we must also honour and respect the infinitely more complex timetable the world has set for itself. That timetable is the sum of thousands of independent timetables of an infinite number of natural, historical and human actions.'

cutting down risks

If we build our homes on an active fault line where the earth's land masses grind against each other, we're at risk of earthquakes. We can't stop an earthquake; but we needn't be completely at its mercy. Even if we can't move out of range, we can make sure that buildings are constructed to minimise damage. Life isn't risk-free anywhere, but there are almost always conceivable choices to make about its dangers. In the same way, there are elements in our societies over which we may have only limited influence; but we can take some control of their effects.

Most things in our lives are more amenable to influence than earthquakes. But we have a talent for making things complicated. Often what needs to be done to achieve a particular social aim isn't clear; it's hardly ever free from debate. But now we have behind us a century of unparalleled bloodshed and barbarism, it's obvious we must ensure there isn't another. And it's not just technology or megalomaniac tyrants that have made so much work for gravediggers. A million people were killed in Rwanda without the benefit of hi-tech weapons.

guns and rocks

In Britain relatively few people own guns. After any appalling act of gun violence, protesters focus on tightening up vetting procedures for gun ownership. In America, however, there has been a widespread 'gun culture', inherited from the country's conflict-ridden history; its 'gun lobby' has strongly resisted control or abolition of personal weapons. Despite public horror at the growth of gun massacres in the 1990s, the US National Rifle Association has had its arguments ready: it is people who kill, not guns. If you don't have a gun, you can use a rock instead.

But having guns can put killing in mind. Unlike rocks, guns are designed and manufactured by us, and for one simple destructive function. Their invention and development is our responsibility, the product of certain social, political and religious values – which we've used weapons to promote and support (while objecting to other people doing the same thing). In this sense, the NRA is right: it is people's beliefs and values that kill. When guns fall into the hands of disturbed and dangerous people, that's our responsibility as well.

In fact, weapons are far from neutral objects; their very existence exerts influence,

'We need to say very firmly that children learn responsibility best and gain a sense of moral values by discussing, with good guidance from the earliest age, real and controversial issues.'

What does peace look like?
'I know what is a mine, or tank, or a kalashnikov. But I don't know what peace looks like. Because I have not seen it. I have just heard of it from others.

I know lots of weapons. For I have seen almost all of them in the bazaar, the street, on the walls of my school, in front of my house, in the buses and everywhere.

Some people say peace is a bird, and some say it is luck. I don't know how it comes. But I know whenever peace comes, flowers will be planted instead of mines. No school will be closed and no houses will be levelled to the ground and I will not cry for persons killed.

When peace comes, people can easily go home and live in their houses, and by then, no gunmen will ask them "What do you do here?" Because they will go to their own houses and again nobody will ask them "What do you do in your own house?"

When peace comes, I will see what it looks like. I am sure I will then forget the name of all the weapons I know.'
Habib Akbar, Afghanistan.

creates situations. Guns, landmines or Trident missiles, they broadcast an unambiguous message about their owners. It's a message people have seemed unwilling to examine. Someone going on a rampage with a rifle is commonly perceived as deranged. How, then, should we assess someone laying a landmine that could be (and often is) picked up by a child who loses limb or life as a result? What responsibility is shouldered by weapon-makers? 'We're meeting a need,' say the manufacturers; 'we're just doing a job', say their employees. What about the government leader prepared to contemplate using nuclear weapons? How does he or she compare with the crazed gunman? What makes a decision to kill 'better' if it's made while of sound mind?

Weapons issues like these may seem remote from the lives of young children, but young children are victims of war, and are affected by growing up in a world in which the machinery of war exists. Numerous surveys in the 1980s showed that the threat of nuclear war coloured children's fatalistic views of the world and their future in it. Those children may now be parents: has their children's outlook on the world been affected? Is the next generation perhaps not fearful but, worse, indifferent?

Those who continue to support the existence of nuclear weapons, claiming their supposed deterrent value, would vigorously deny that this implies support of fighting and wars around the world. But there is a link: the continuing belief that armed force is an acceptable means of settling conflicts. The 20th century has taught us we shouldn't be indifferent to that.

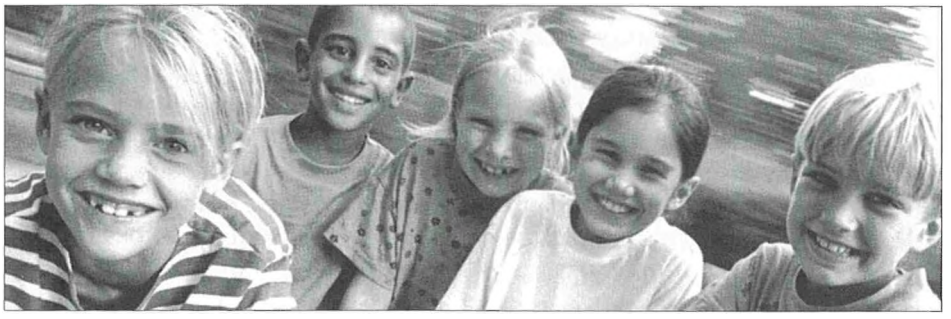
creating a better world

Human beings are capable of horrific acts of violence against each other. Creating a world in which we can live peacefully together is a huge task and a daunting prospect. The purpose of this book is not to persuade you to take the necessary step towards a war-free world – you wouldn't be reading it if you didn't already think the effort worth while. But we hope it will help to sustain your conviction that working for peace is a vital human activity. Despite attacks and abuses, 'peace' continues to stand almost universally for something good and desirable. We can start building on that – today.

During the latter part of the 20th century 'racism' and 'sexism' became terms of disapproval, indicating unacceptable social attitudes. The history of words like these shows that social attitudes really can be changed. If we can choose not to act by our social prejudices, we can also choose to raise social objections to violence and war.

So we have both an opportunity and a challenge. We have an opportunity to do things differently because we know we can and many of us feel we must. The challenge is to construct, develop and protect a system of values which places sympathy for fellow human beings at its centre.

First we must recognise how society encourages children to accept violence as a natural part of life. Then we must find ways to dismantle that process, and move towards a world in which war is no longer an acceptable option.



learning about war

Many parents have seen their children at play pretending to shoot and kill. Sometimes the game is played with an intensity and apparent pleasure that parents can find disturbing. What has happened to the peaceful values they've been trying to encourage in their children? Where might this compelling interest in violence lead?

People who want a ban on violent games and toys often argue that such things teach children militaristic values and attitudes. Those who oppose a ban maintain that for children violent play is only 'pretend', unconnected to violence in the real world; as for the pleasure the pretence provides, that's harmless too.

It's true that children's political thinking is different from that of adults. Children's ideas about, say, what countries and governments are, or what causes fighting between them, are necessarily unsophisticated, interpreted through the modest social structures of the children's immediate environment. Children's political thinking may surprise, or amuse, adults who get a glimpse of it; beyond that, a child's world-view is seldom expressed in political terms, and so is not explored in them either.

Nevertheless it is a political view. Children daily add to their impressions of how the world works, and create their own political understanding of it. Though as adults we may not remember doing so, as children we too described our world to ourselves in terms that recognised administrative structures, justice systems, and power struggles.

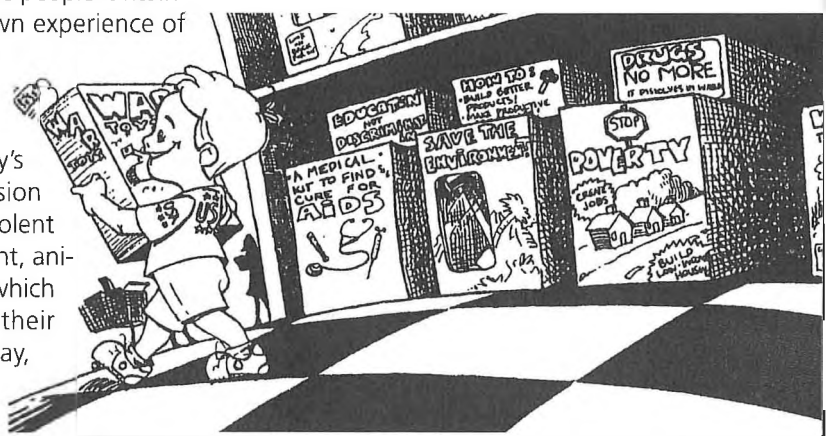
Children carry their interpretation of the world into their play. Equally, they bring to the real world what their play teaches them. Violent play, particularly with replica military toys, can have a significant role in a child's approaches to social interaction, as well as later on when adolescent political understanding takes shape. The attitudes, values and political views we hold as adults, and the vigour or apathy with which we hold them, are rooted in our early years.

Moral and political experiences are part of children's daily lives as well as our own. Children see and experience good and evil, right and wrong – concepts often put before them, and not always clearly. Children observe, though they may not yet fully understand, such things as disparities in wealth and power. They also learn about conflict, and begin to grasp the scale on which it can operate.

Imagine a child who knows that her home is in, say, Britain. She hears the news that 'Britain' has gone to war in Iraq. She also hears that 'Britain' provides food and medicine for starving people in Ethiopia. At school her group may be making gifts for European orphans of war. It's not surprising if she concludes that there are some people 'Britain' (which includes herself) wants to hurt and some people 'Britain' wants to help. She may link this conclusion to her own experience of harm and help, her own ideas about 'friends' and 'enemies'. Specific, named hostilities can be learned very young.

Much of the conflict-related political content today's children bring to their violent play comes from television and its related sources, including computer games. Violent toys and cartoons offer prevailing themes of resentment, animosity and reprisal. Our children grow up in a world which provides images of these emotions specifically for their entertainment. As children embark on their violent play, how can they fail to assume that people in the real world think violence is fun, too?

'...It would be absurd for children's moral education to take as the main theme how not to become commander of a concentration camp. But, luckily, the ethics of preventing atrocities are an extension of the ethics of everyday life. At the supermarket people do not park in the disabled space partly because they do not want disabled persons to have the indignity and difficulty of struggling to carry groceries. They may also not want to be someone who is mean enough to cause this. The real resources here are the same as those needed in moral emergencies. It is a question of knowing and guarding against the ways in which they fail in those emergencies.'



Violence:
'The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury or damage to persons or property; action or conduct characterised by this.'
Force:
'...Strength, impetus, violence, or intensity. Power or might; esp military power.... A body of armed men, an army..... A body of police....'
Injury:
'Wrongful action or treatment; violation or infringement of another's rights; suffering or mischief wilfully or unjustly inflicted.... Intentionally hurtful or offensive speech or word...'
Shorter Oxford Dictionary

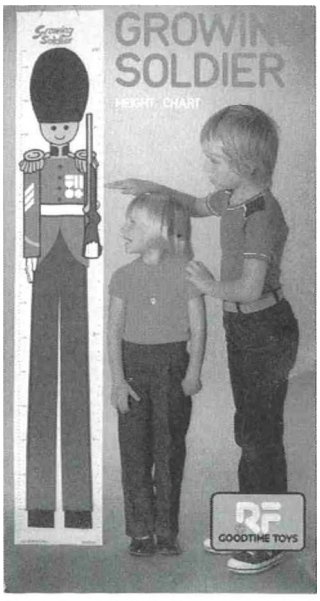
the strange case of acceptable violence

from a loving slap to collateral damage

Where do we start? Just after the terrible slaughter of the Second World war, the French writer Albert Camus posed what he called the great political question of our time. 'Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to be killed or assaulted? Do you, or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to kill or assault?'

Try it. You'll find that the answer has all kinds of implications. Camus said that it's necessary to understand what fear means: 'Fear implies and rejects the same fact: a world where murder is legitimate, and where human life is considered trifling.' As for his questions, he says, 'All who say No to both these questions are automatically committed to a series of consequences which must modify their way of posing problems.' And, he said, you have to know your position on this before you can deal with any other issues.

Most people agree that they don't want a violent society. Beyond that comforting consensus, however, views begin to diverge almost at once, often radically. Violence means different things to different people. If we want the new century to be less violent than the last, we have to ensure that the next generation is less attached to using violence to achieve change. This is the challenge facing those of us responsible for bringing up children or teaching them. To help children develop an understanding of what violence and non-violence mean, we need to have a firmer grip on these slippery abstractions ourselves .



'One day you'll be tall enough to fire a gun.'
Too many people grow up thinking that soldiers mean safety.

But there's no real safety anywhere as long as there are weapons and armies to use them. We need to teach children to measure up, not to military forces, but to the example set by people tackling conflict with nonviolent techniques and peacemaking teamwork.

double-think

Consider the following statements: 'The perpetrators of this brutal act of violence must be severely punished. Society must be protected from people like this.' and 'We give thanks to our brave airmen who risked their lives so that we may live in freedom.' In one case the perpetrators are brutes, because of the violence of their act. In the other, they're heroes; the violence of their acts (bombing and killing) is invisible, not even mentioned; if it were, we'd find living with the contradiction too difficult.

In every sphere of life acts of violence are variously condemned or commended. As we argue about how justified it was and what punishment, if any, is appropriate, the act itself, and the pain or damage it created, often disappears from the discussion. Other factors transform it: economics, cultural values, personal views. A boy is jailed for killing a toddler; a prime minister is praised for his military decisions, though children have been killed as a result of them. The equal awfulness of any child's murder is obscured by our double-thinking assessments of motive and state of mind.

A recent magazine published by the Refugee Council aimed to show that refugees, displaced victims of war, aren't a burden to their host countries. On the contrary, many turn out to be valued citizens and in some cases outstanding achievers. Included in the latter category was Madeleine Albright, the Czech-born US Secretary of State. Was she included ironically? When (as US Ambassador to the United Nations) she was asked by a television interviewer what she thought of the deaths of half a million children as a result of UN sanctions against Iraq, this was her reply: 'I think this is a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it'. It's unlikely that the magazine accepted

infant deaths as an unremarkable feature of power politics. It's more likely that in admiring her career achievements they simply forgot the appalling opinion she once expressed. People have an extraordinary, and alarming, ability to condone acts of violence carried out in the name of politics, and to absolve of guilt the public figures who ordered them to be done.

'not acceptable at all'

A Barnardo's pamphlet on smacking clearly understands how slippery the definition of violence is. To a question about 'ordinary little smacks', the pamphlet replies, 'Of course it would be absurd to argue that a smack is the same as whipping, but it's equally absurd to argue that they are unrelated. They are different points on the same continuum'. It goes on: 'Discussion about how much physical violence towards children is acceptable distracts attention from the fact that physical violence towards children is not acceptable at all.'

The pamphlet quotes an official report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. 'If it is not permissible to beat an adult, why should it be permissible to do so to a child? One of the contributions of the Convention is to call attention to the contradiction in our attitudes and culture.'

In 1999 each taxpayer in Britain paid over £830 towards the cost of preparation for and execution of war

Barnardo's concern with violence is properly restricted to its own sphere. Comments on grosser forms of violence – nuclear weapons for example – could be thought inappropriate in an article on the physical punishment of children. Nevertheless, with its reference to the UN Convention, Barnardo's focuses attention on that 'contradiction in our attitudes' regarding violence as a whole.

The logic is reassuring, too. Physical punishment is unacceptable so a scale for its application is valueless. There is another continuum, the one with a fist-fight at one end and war at the other, which deserves similar moral and political disapproval.

a matter of state

A more ambitious publication is the excellent report by the Commission on Children and Violence. Among other things it recommends that 'a commitment to non-violence – *which does not have to be pacifist or non-competitive* [our italics] – should be adopted by individuals, communities and governments at all levels'.

Those 'contradictions in our attitudes' are present here too. Promotion of a commitment to non-violence at 'all levels' is, of course, warmly welcomed. But that qualification, 'which does not have to be pacifist or non-competitive' – doesn't that tie the commitment's feet together before it starts to walk?

The Report doesn't say what it means by 'non-violence', but does helpfully describe violence as 'behaviour by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm' – a definition hard to fault. So why the exclusion clause? There are a number of possibilities. Maybe committee members felt uncomfortable recommending non-violence to a government with a working army. Maybe they thought violence was occasionally acceptable.

Here we see 'violence' getting the political treatment. What is war if not 'behaviour

CONFLICT SURPRISE
A RECIPE FOR WAR

ingredients 5kg of greed, 2kg of anger, 1 large selfish (very ripe), 5kg of mistrust, 7kg of over-ripe violence, 3 large misunderstandings.

method Using fist, mix in the greed and envy, let it simmer for an hour. Kick the raw anger in. Squeeze the selfish and add it to thicken the mixture. Sprinkle in the mistrust and stir thoroughly. Using tank, fire in the violence. Beat in the misunderstanding, take a world leader and empty its mind of peaceful thoughts. Using half the mixture, refill the mind, carefully put world leader back in its place. Using sword, spread the other half of the mixture across one of the world's countries. Remember to stand back after you have done this: you may become a victim of your own creation. Watch for the after-effects, you will enjoy the pain and suffering. You will find it impossible to clean the kitchen when you have finished: all the ingredients will contaminate the rest of the kitchen.

Quick tip: For fuller flavour act first, think later. *11 year old girl.*

A common point of view

The cartoon above is a good starting point for your own thinking as well as an image to stimulate discussion in the classroom.

- Copy and enlarge the cartoon for classroom use.
- Discuss the differences between 'violence' and 'war', focusing on their different causes.
- Invite the children to write a short head-to-head dialogue for the cartoon characters, one defending Dad's opinion and the other questioning it. Act them out, encouraging discussion of the arguments employed.Basic facts about war: www.gn.apc.org/peacepledge/info.

'The Department for Education and Employment recommends that school caterers give vegetables dynamic, militaristic names to convert young children, especially boys, to eat vegetables.

Suggested menus for primary schools would include "carrot spears" and '"potato cannon balls" to complement a "grilled gladiator burger". Even the ideal dessert, a "fighting-fit fruit salad", is suffused with can-do toughness.

School meals were introduced after the Boer War in which officers were horrified by the poor condition of their troops.'

'It's just as well I don't work here. If I caught someone doing this I would kill them,' said RSPB's Iolo Williams, visiting Italy and seeing small traps laid by local hunters to catch small migrating birds.'

by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm'? What is war if not multiple acts of violence dramatically affecting whole societies? Yet in the Commission's report the grossest form of violence, state-sanctioned and with megadeath capacity, is tidied away as though war has no relation to our understanding of what violence – and non-violence – is.

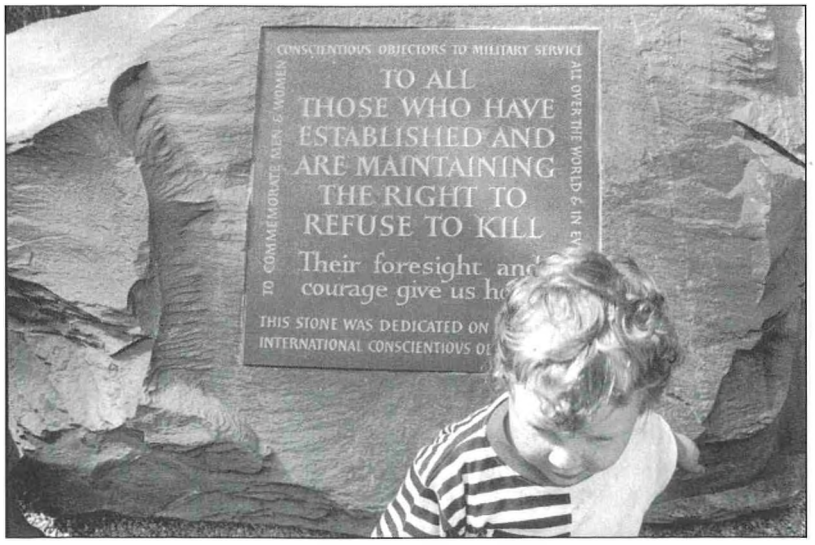
Despite the Commission's good intentions, we're left to decide for ourselves when to attach the 'non' to 'violence'. Which means reminding ourselves that if we see violence in culturally and politically limited terms we're not likely to spot its most potent sources.

talking peace

Indeed, as long as we ignore the violence built into society, teaching children non-violence is likely to remain a flawed enterprise. We want them to be co-operative and resolve their conflicts without violence. But we're teaching them in a world which endorses violence, openly or implicitly, on every level. Children learn from what they observe.

The first step – and you can take it now – is to question all aspects of children's experience that condone violence. To question is to challenge, and in challenging you'll begin to develop a vocabulary of peace. With this new 'peace-talk', children can more clearly describe the kind of world they want to live in and discover what actions are needed to make it real.

Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to be killed or assaulted? Do you, or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to kill or assault? If you say No to both these questions, you're committed to a new way of posing problems.



A stone honouring conscientious objectors to military service
In many countries (no longer in Britain) young men who refuse to kill find themselves in prison with murderers.

Suggest that children do a research project on COs in World War 2. Maybe there's someone in your town willing to talk about their experiences.

KEY WORDS

At home or in the classroom, provide a noticeboard or book where everyone can write down words to do with war, peace and violence, as they come across them.
Encourage an actively inquisitive and broad approach to finding the words: listening to what people say, looking at advertisements, searching books and magazines and the internet, being alert everywhere from playground and shops to dentist's waiting room and holiday beach.
Regularly review the words collected, working with dictionaries to look up definitions (often circular!). Add to the list using a thesaurus – a rich source of 'eureka' connections.
Sort out the words into their types and usages, and discuss and experiment with their varied meanings in child-built sentences, showing how some words can be 'made' to convey a covert meaning.
Talk about words which refer to ideas and values rather than actions and objects. Idea-words and value-words – such as 'justice', 'violence', 'peace' and 'war' – have meanings far beyond their dictionary definitions, which makes problems: explore this with the children.

▶ Ideal curriculum activity for **Key stage 2** *English and Information and Communication Technology* [but often a revelation for us adults]

what on earth are war toys?

War toys aren't what they used to be. War toys began as small-scale models of soldiers and weaponry, representing real regiments of cavalry and infantry. They were used in play to re-enact historic battles or to work out tactics or invented ones. (There are still people around who take this kind of war-gaming seriously, but it's a cult interest among adults, not children.) It was these war toys that were singled out as undesirably militaristic by people who saw war not only as grim and painful but also as immoral and unnecessary. Many of these people took part in the big campaigns for peace that were mounted in the early years of the 20th century. The campaigners' objections to war toys in particular were based on the belief that they stimulate enthusiasm for war. Certainly Winston Churchill thought his toy soldiers had influenced the course of his life [see side box], though most people continued to think that war toys stimulated nothing more than the desire to play with them.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant, who died in 1804, asserted that war is neither natural nor divine but entirely our own invention; responsibility for peace was therefore in our hands as well. In response to Kant's theories, democratic and humanitarian movements arose, pursuing human happiness by way of human virtues, of which peaceful conflict-solving was one. These in turn inspired and influenced 20th century movements for educational reform. Teachers who were already campaigning for peace began to favour, for example, teaching history in a less nationalistic and war-oriented way. They argued for arbitration instead of war as a means of resolving international disputes. They objected to pro-war books, films and songs; and of course they objected to war toys.

It was not long before a movement dedicated to the banning of war toys sprang

story of my life

'I was now embarked on a military career. This orientation was entirely due to my collection of soldiers. I had ultimately nearly fifteen hundred. They were all of one size, all British, and organised as an infantry division with a cavalry brigade. My brother Jack commanded the hostile army...The day came when my father himself paid a formal visit of inspection. All the troops were arranged in the correct formation of attack. He spent twenty minutes studying the scene – which was really impressive...At the end he asked me if I would like to go into the Army. I thought it would be splendid to command an Army, so I said Yes at once: and immediately I was taken at my word...the toy soldiers turned the current of my life. Henceforward all my education was directed to passing into Sandhurst [officer training school].'

EXCHANGING PROBLEMS

Kosovo or Colombia, South Africa or America: in war-zones and conflict areas all round the world people and groups are challenging the violence-condoning values of many playthings. They are working to replace 'toys of war' with toys that are free from associations with war and violence – and fun to play with.

In less violent places, such as Britain, Toy Exchange projects and 'amnesties' can be ridiculed.

But there are war-zones where more complicated exchanges take place: war-hardened children, some of them as young as 9 or 10, have to exchange real guns for (if they're lucky) time in a rehabilitation centre. All of them face an uncertain future that is likely to be troubled and unhappy.

How about setting up a Toy Exchange scheme in your school or neighbourhood?

War toy swap, Kosovo Christmas 1999

joined-up thinking

Shortly after the Dunblane school massacre and the debate about the availability of guns, a Bill amending the Firearms Act was passed without comment. This removed doubts about the legality of cadets handling and firing weapons and the handling of weapons by members of the public at military displays. It also empowered the MoD to pay for firing ranges to be built and maintained on school premises, and this may be agreed by the governors despite objections by parents, pupils or staff.

up. But by then both war and toys had changed.

a shift of focus

Until the last decades of the 20th century, objections to war toys were focused on the toys' relation to war and their implicit endorsement of it. But those finely detailed and painted miniatures of combatant platoons with their weapons and transport were now out of date: modern warfare and modern technology had arrived. The term 'war toy' was now loosely applied to any toy associated with armed violence: these included child-size replicas of ancient and modern weapons, paramilitary dolls, artillery miniatures, or plastic tanks big enough for a toddler to sit in and shunt around. Models you put together yourself, such as fighter planes and battleships, occupied a grey area between 'war toy' and 'craftwork'.

Objectors paid particular attention to weapon replicas, from the humble water pistol and pop-gun to expensive life-like imitations of small-arms. Criminals had quickly found a use for real-scale handgun replicas, which caused concern, though not as much as the use of real guns in real massacres, such as at Hungerford and Dunblane. Many people were increasingly anxious about personal and social safety. Relatively few now concerned themselves with international stability and the evils of war; at least, they felt that these were things over which they could have no influence or control. Indeed, 'war' was no longer the issue associated with the new toys, the epithet serving only as a nod to their military link. It now meant 'violence' or 'aggression'.

Anxiety created by the connections of toy guns with violent crime provoked toy manufacturers and retailers to respond defensively. The toy industry produced a 'Guide' for parents, followed by a 'Report' which claimed to prove that play with war toys was not only harmless, it was actively beneficial. After Dunblane the Co-operative retail chain issued a leaflet assuring buyers of their concern for children's well-being: no toy weapons were on sale at their outlets.

two points of view...

There are essentially two positions on war toys. First, children's play offers a 'micro-reality' in which children use games and toys to rehearse possible future roles and events. 'Children learn through listening and watching and then by imitating and acting out': so well-supported is this view, it has the status of accepted fact. What perplexes the anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers who have made it their study is why loving, responsible parents tolerate, let alone buy, any toy that stimulates their children to act out brutal killing, any game that teaches their children to think and behave like armed adults in life-or-death conflict.

The alternative view, which also commands support from convinced psychologists, is that the pretence of killing and violence is a healthy outlet for aggressive emotions. There are beliefs that war-play provides 'fantasies of power' that help children 'master fears of helplessness in real life'; some even say that it teaches co-operative skills. Furthermore, in societies historically rooted in war and killing, as most are, people can claim at least cultural legitimacy for choosing role models from war heroes, and even for regarding non-violence as cowardly, politically dangerous or corrupt. Here the 'experts' look for a balanced diet of good behaviour and letting off steam, encouraging children to grasp the great social contradiction: how principles of local personal peaceability can coexist with state-promoted principles which endorse war as an acceptable way to resolve large-scale disputes.

If they can. Here is Sandy Leon, author of 'Teaching Kids To Kill': 'We have placed an impossible burden on our children. From circumcision to war, we tolerate, even admire, institutional ruthlessness, aggression, greed, violence, environmental destruc-

■ Fun day out at the fair

tiveness and killing. By routinely discouraging and forbidding the same behaviour in individuals, we have become a society of contradiction and hypocrisy.'

'But', she adds, 'hypocrisy is quickly perceived by the young'. When children grow up 'disinterested, rebellious and even contemptuous of adult society', adult society needs to take another look at that 'impossible burden' and why it's there.

'...so where do you stand?'

It's never been proved scientifically that war play is causally linked to aggression. But it's never been proved that it isn't. In fact the links between war play and aggression can't be proved either way, because they belong to a category in which definitive studies can't be done. (The act of observing itself alters the situation being observed, and may have hidden aims; the situation itself contains other unquantifiable factors and influences; violence itself has many triggers.) So what's left?

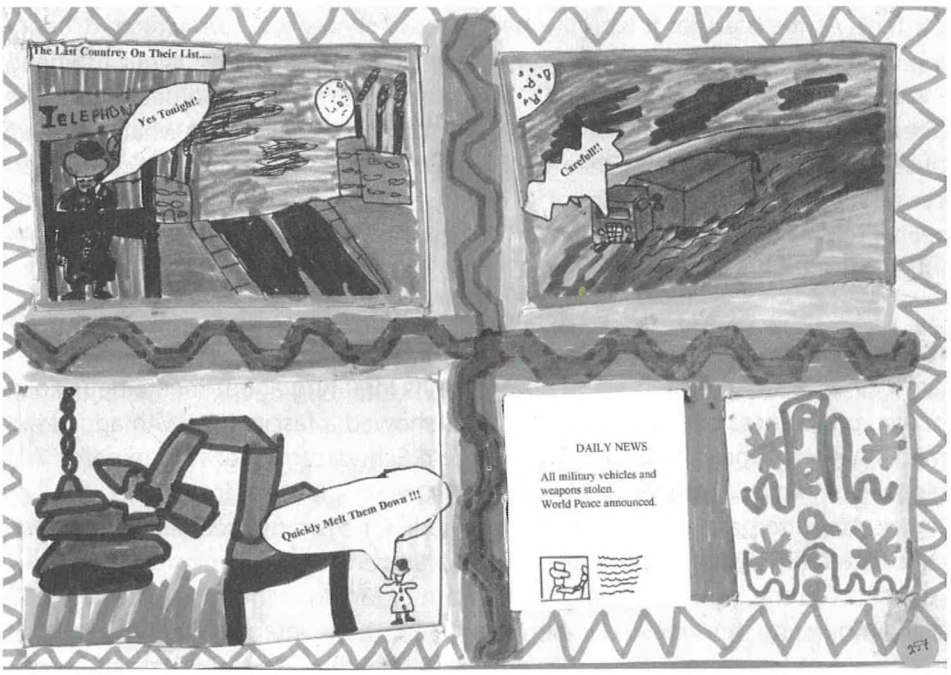
First, a thoughtful assessment of what you see. Second, your own conviction about what's right. As Sandy Leon says, 'the tragedy of parents ignoring their own intuition cannot be overstated'. Making choices without evidence is something most people do every day: choices of belief, choices of morality, choices of health and taste. We can listen to the arguments of 'experts' if we want to. But in the end the choices are ours. Legitimate choices, too, when underpinned by a commitment to prevent harm.

Meanwhile, watch for a troubling sign. 'War toys' is a term now used to refer to the most up-to-date military equipment, clothing, weapons and gadgets, whether in use, prototype or years-ahead design. These certainly aren't playthings. The 'digitised battlefield' is becoming real, enhancing 'lethality, survivability, mobility and sustainment', using 'software that looks and works very much like a Windows program'. Isn't it time war toys were put away for good? If we discourage them out of existence, the day can dawn when people ask 'What on earth were war toys?' with a puzzled frown.

A sequence of facts which may be helpful:
Toy weapons don't physically kill or maim.
But playing with them requires mimicry of killing and violence.
Mimicry of killing and violence has not been conclusively proved to make children aggressive except in the short term.
But mimicry of killing and violence hasn't been conclusively proved to sublimate or limit aggressiveness.
Play with violence-condoning toys and games creates a significant risk of harmfully confusing children's perceptions about weapons, violence and war.

THE SAFE OPTION:
It looks clear: say No to violence-condoning toys. Whatever the toy industry, retailers, advertisers and some 'experts' may say, these toys carry an invisible 'This can damage your mental health' warning.

Adrian Kastelic



scrap the lot

This obvious solution to the problem of national arsenals shows that the 7-year-old painter took a dim view of government ability to tackle disarmament. And it's encouraging to see support for the view that individuals can and should take some kind of initiative themselves.
Invite the children you know to draw or paint their own ideas for achieving a more peaceful world. If possible, encourage the cartoon-strip form which commits the artist to depict a process rather than a single act. Inspire and support the artists with brainstorming discussions of what 'peace' would be like as well as how to get it. Children who prefer using words can provide accompanying text, dialogue or exposition.
(See also page 20)

globalisation of violent values

In the first ever international survey conducted on children and media violence, a UNESCO study underlines television's dominant role in the lives of young people around the world and its impact on the development of aggressive behaviour; it paves the way for a stronger debate between politicians, producers, teachers and parents.

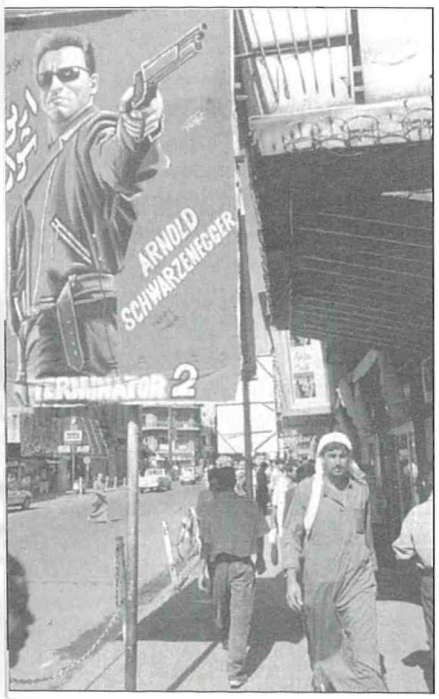
How do the world's children spend most of their leisure time? The answer – watching television – may come as no great surprise, but the UNESCO Global Media Violence Study, the largest ever intercultural project on this topic, sheds light on the striking similarities of television's impact in vastly different cultural, economic and social contexts.

In the areas surveyed, from relatively peaceful environments like Canada and certain high-crime neighbourhoods in Brazil, to war-zones in Angola and Tajikistan, the study confirmed the dominant role of television in the everyday lives of children around the globe: 93% of the students who attend school and live in electrified urban or rural areas have regular access to television and watch it for an average of three hours a day. This represents at least 50% more than the time spent on any other out-of-school activity, including homework, being with friends, or reading. The result justifies the assumption that television is the most powerful source of information and entertainment besides face-to-face interaction.

With the advent of mass media, including television and, more recently, video and computer games, children and teenagers are exposed to increasingly high doses of aggressive images. In many countries, there is an average of five to ten aggressive acts per hour of television. Violence among youth is also on the rise, making it plausible to correlate the two, even though we believe that the primary causes for aggressive behaviour in children are to be found in their family environment and the social and economic conditions in which they are raised.

Nonetheless, the media play a major role in the development of cultural orientations, world views and beliefs. Most studies show that the relation between media violence and 'real' violence is interactive. The media can contribute to an aggressive culture; people who are already aggressive use the media as further confirmation of their beliefs and attitudes, which, in turn, are reinforced through media content. As the basis for this study, the 'compass' theory was formulated: depending on a child's already existing experiences, values and the cultural environment, media content offers an orientation, a frame of reference, which determines the direction of one's own behaviour. Viewers do not necessarily adapt what they have observed, but they measure their own behaviour in terms of distance to the perceived media models. For instance, if cruelty is 'common', 'just' kicking someone seems to be innocent by comparison if the cultural environment has not established an alternative frame of reference.

Terminator – the prototype media hero



media heroes

Answers to a standardised set of 60 questions inquiring about media behaviour, habits, preferences and social environments showed a fascination with aggressive media heroes, especially among boys: Arnold Schwarzenegger's 'Terminator' is a global icon, known by 88% of the children surveyed, be they from India, Brazil or Japan. Asked to name their favourite role models, boys most frequently named an action hero (30%), while girls opted for pop stars. There are regional differences: Asia showed the highest ranking for the former (34%), Africa the lowest (18%), with Europe and the Americas in between (25%). More interesting is how children in difficult situations identify with such heroes, whether as compensation or as an

escape: 51% of the children from war-zones or high-crime environments wish to be like their chosen hero, as compared to 37% in the low-aggression neighbourhoods.

overlapping worlds

A remarkable number of children from both groups (44%) report a strong overlap in what they perceive as reality and what they see on the screen. Many children are surrounded by an environment where 'real' and media experiences both support the view that violence is natural. Close to one third of the group living in high-aggression environments think that most people in the world are evil, a perception reinforced by media content. The impact of media violence can primarily be explained by the fact that aggressive behaviour is more systematically rewarded than more conciliatory ways of coping with one's life. It is often presented as gratuitous and thrilling, and is interpreted as a good problem-solver in a variety of situations. Contrary to the case of many novels or more sophisticated movies, media violence is often not set in a context. For children living in more stable environments, it offers a 'thrill': nearly half the children who prefer aggressive media content (as compared to 19% with another media preference) express the desire to be involved in a risky situation. This holds particularly true for boys and tends to increase the more advanced the technological environment.

Violence has always been an ingredient of children's adventure and suspense movies. What is critical is the dominance and extreme it has reached. Furthermore, as the media become even more realistic with the introduction of three dimensions (virtual reality) and interactivity (computer games and multimedia), the representation of violence 'merges' increasingly with reality.

colour of violence

'One way in which cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from "red/wrong" to "green/right", or at least to "yellow/acceptable". For example, "Murder on behalf of a country is right, murder on behalf of oneself is wrong".

Another way is by making reality opaque, like drawing a thick curtain across a window, so that we don't see the violent act or the violent fact; or at least we don't see it as violent as it really is.'

MAKE YOUR OWN SURVEY

Work with the children in your class to make a list of places and things which extend knowledge about war/violence. Use this list to make two more. First, places and things which implicity or explicitly support war/violence (e.g. Nelson's Column). Second, places and things which implicitly or explicitly oppose war/violence: probably not so many! – but resourceful ideas should be encouraged. The lists could be kept on display for additions as they're discovered. (Have the children looked closely at the local war memorial?)

Follow-up activity: with the children devise a careful list of questions to put to friends, family, etc., to discover responses to items on the lists. Adults approached might be asked if they have any experience of war/violence (which could affect their answers). Set up a structured timescale for the survey. When the returns are in, sort and discuss the results. This should include talking about the answers (honest? bias-free?) and whether the right questions had been chosen to obtain the best and most reliable information.

This exercise also provides a chance to show how surveys and opinion polls work, and to assess their value. There's a chance here, when children are ready for it (by Year 6 certainly), to discuss 'leading questions', propaganda techniques, and 'spin', which can be linked to discussion of how war/violence is reported – and which of the two lists such reports belong to.

▶ Ideal curriculum activity for **Key stage 2** *English and Information, Communication Technology and History*.

Close to one third of the group living in high-aggression environments think that most people in the world are evil

peace: what's it all about?

Few concepts are so important, and at the same time so charged with meaning, as war, conflict and peace, because events related to them have a crucial influence on the well-being of individuals and societies. Studies of what children as young as five understand by these concepts reveal the nature of the problem facing those who want to develop and promote peace education. Children's understanding of war comes long before their understanding of peace; and peace is defined by the absence of war or war-related matters. While all the children in these studies were able to give a 'reasonable' definition of war, some of the younger ones were incapable of defining peace.

Georgia Cannell

A child's attempt to answer that difficult question.

When children (and adults) think of peace they are more likely to conceive it in relation and reaction to war – what has come to be called 'negative peace' – rather than as a proactive, positive process involving understanding and co-operation amongst peoples and nations: 'positive peace'.

Peace plays second fiddle to war. War is seen by children as an event that exists in itself: 'War is shooting, weapons, and fighting'. On the other hand, peace is viewed mainly as a subordinate event: 'Peace is when there is no war'. The subordinate role of peace is widely documented. Children of all ages base their preference for peace over war primarily on 'negative peace' reasons ('Peace is better than war because there is no war and people aren't killed') rather than on 'positive peace' reasons ('Peace is better than war because we are friends'). Many people tend to think that the virtue of peace is that it avoids the consequences of war, not that it has its own positive outcomes. The development of a culture of peace therefore has to face – and change – the pervasive tendency of both children and adults to think of peace simply as a negation of war.

'I think it is wrong to fight wars. The only wars that should be fought are peaceful ones.'

John, 11

PACKAGING PEACE

Aim: to define and evaluate peace and how it can be achieved ('War's already been done'), and present this effectively.

You will need sample packaging (e.g. breakfast cereal boxes) as models, the more visually elaborate the better. See also the cartoon on page 11.

Working in an even number of groups of optimum size, the children are asked to make a list of words and phrases describing peace and then arrange them in an order of importance. Repeat the exercise for actions they think would achieve and maintain peace. Next, sum up and write down instructions to an advertising agency hired to design a peace package with the agreed priorities.

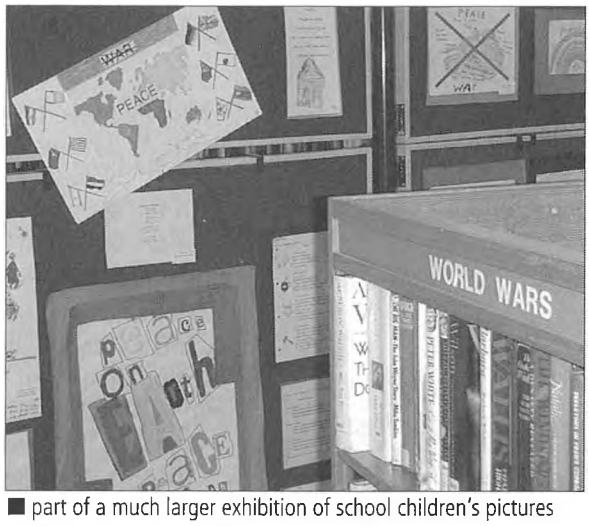
The groups then exchange instructions and take on the role of advertising agency. Their job now is to design a carton for a 'peace-making' product according to the instructions they've just been given.

After looking at each result, the class should then discuss how effective they are and how convincingly they convey the 'message'.

▸ Ideal curriculum activity for **Key stage 2** *English, Information and Communication Technology and Art and Design*.

While many children in these studies mentioned the absence of war as one of the consequences of living in peace, none indicated the absence of peace as a consequence of war. Furthermore, the children viewed 'bad people' as responsible for war more often than they viewed 'good people' as responsible for peace. At a deeper level, and from the age of five, when asked to choose between sanctioning a positive act and a negative act, children say that people do not have to be praised for doing what they should do, but that they should always be blamed, or even punished, for misbehaviour.

If our aim is to move to a culture of peace we need to understand that no remedy is effective when we look at the symptoms of a disease (war) while ignoring their underlying causes. Does it make sense to think of an unjust yet peaceful world? Looked at this way we can see peace as a moral injunction which helps us not to lose sight of the underlying causes of violence, and war. We need to fix our attention on the causes of peace: a cure, not a disease.



■ part of a much larger exhibition of school children's pictures and text on the theme of peace on display in local library

Peace thus is not only a responsibility of individuals but also of society in general and of course, crucially, of schools.

making peace

A number of primary schools in South London pooled their resources to produce a major exhibition of children's drawings, paintings and writing about peace and how to achieve it. (Some of their work is reproduced in this book.) The exhibition was so successful that months later it was remounted by popular demand.

Activities like this give children a good opportunity to think about peace. Just as important, they give value and credence to 'peace' as a self-sufficient concept. Peace has its own positive nature, and isn't simply the absence of war. 'War', however, could be defined as, say, 'a disorder or malfunction of peace'. Children can be asked to suggest further definitions like this, of 'war' *in terms of* 'peace' (one suggestion was 'peace with a tummy ache'), and illustrate them for an exhibition.

Exhibitions and other creative activities focused on peace can be combined with some kind of positive social action in the community/neighbourhood, aiming to show that peace is not just an idea but something to do and work for: action that, even on the smallest scale, prevents war.

thinking about war 1

Sean's story

At Sean's school, as in many other schools each November, white poppies were on sale side by side with red ones. Teachers wanted to provide children with the opportunity to think about war and its causes and let pupils choose how they responded to it.

Sean chose the white poppy, which he felt most reflected what he felt, and bought it with his pocket money. He wore it proudly at the Sunday Scouts parade. But his Scoutmaster told him to take it off: it was, he said, 'not an appropriate symbol for Remembrance Day', and he gave Sean a red poppy to wear instead.

Sean well understood the significance of the white poppy, and did not see why he should not be able to wear it in church or anywhere else. The vicar who officiated at the service thought the same, and said he was pleased to welcome anybody into church whether they were wearing a white poppy or a red one.

What did Sean do with his white poppy? 'I put it back on as soon as I went outside.'

Children, indeed most of us, learn about war in all kinds of second- and third-hand ways. As a result we receive a misleading and partial view of the nature of war and what it implies. Wars and armed conflicts don't begin with the first shot, nor end with the last; and in the case of many armed conflicts their aftermath and consequences can often be worse than the 'live' conflict itself. Wars also have a long gestation period, often unrecognised.

Not even the most megalomaniac tyrant can create a war out of nothing. Prosecuting a war certainly needs physical resources; but, more importantly, it also needs the compliance of the people. Compliance is learned young, at the parent's knee and in the classroom. What we comply with, however, may be a matter of choice more often than we think. Wars, according the famous UNESCO statement, are made in people's minds: and 'it is in people's minds that peace must be constructed'. This assertion places the responsibility for peace squarely on all of us. Construction of peace is one side of the equation; dismantling war is the other.

Each November in Britain people are urged to buy a red poppy in memory of those who died in war. (The funds raised are used to help wounded ex-service people and their families.) As the war that brought remembrance ceremonies into being fades further into the past, fewer people – especially young people – care (or maybe even know) much about what such ceremonies mean, though they may buy a poppy. Supporters of Remembrance target young people particularly in their efforts to keep it alive; they insist that we should never forget the sacrifices that people have made. But remembering without drawing some lessons from it is an act without real meaning. If we owe a debt to those who died in war, it is to make a world for the living in which war no longer has any place.

Activity

Remembrance is a good time for examining issues relating to war, in the day-to-day context of public events.

In good time before the next Remembrance Day, ask children to find out about the white and red poppies. How did they come into being? What do they stand for today?

Promoters of both kinds of poppy each supply information material. Ask the children to look carefully at some of this. What can be deduced about the promoters' respective attitudes to war? More particularly, how do they see war being prevented in future?

Questions and issues to consider:

Remembrance Day, though associated with church services, has strong political meanings to do with maintaining official state attitudes to war.

Some people say that Remembrance ceremonies should end, at least as an official public event. Others are anxious that they should continue. Suggest reasons for both views.

How might Remembrance have relevance for children today?

▶ Ideal curriculum activity for **Key stage 2** *English and PSH*

thinking about war 2

War memorials – many of which were originally called peace memorials – can be found in towns, villages, workplaces and even schools. They are important records of our history, but most of us pass by without even noticing them. By the end of the twentieth century it was children who had become the major casualties of war – far more children are killed in wars than soldiers. Even at the beginning of that century there was a hint of what was to come.

> *The morning of Wednesday June 13 1917 was hot, and the sky was hazy. Nevertheless, onlookers in London's East End were able to see 'a dozen or so big aeroplanes scintillating like so many huge silver dragonflies'. These three-seater bombers were carrying shrapnel bombs; that morning they killed 104 people. Sixteen of the dead were 5- and 6-year olds, in their classroom at Upper North Street School, Poplar; two older children also died.*
>
> *'The sun had been shining, and then it seemed to go out in a roar of thunder.' This was the first ever daylight air-raid. It was also one of the first civilian tragedies of 'total' war; and the deaths of the children in particular caught the public's emotions. The funeral, on June 20, was a major public event.*

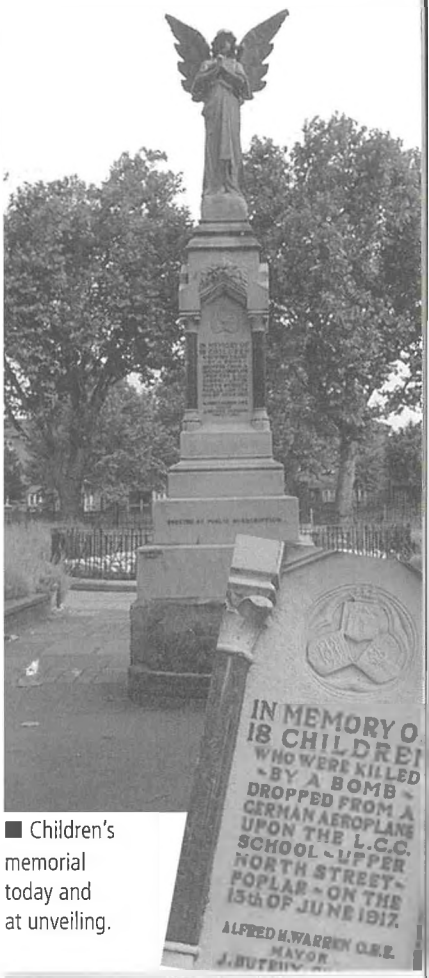
history War memorials can be a good place to start an investigation of people's attitudes to war. (The public library might be willing to help with local history resource materials.) The designs for war memorials were often hotly debated. Different sections of the community had differing ideas and needs, so they often clashed. People with money and power, or 'influence', often had the final say. (Discussion of pre-war society could begin here.) At the time the memorials were created, they were often called 'peace memorials': why this was so, and why the name changed, could start a useful discussion about people's feelings and aspirations after the First World War.

information technology/art & design In the pre-digital age war memorials were an important way of expressing values and aspirations. Compare different memorials: why, for example, were some plain, merely noting the names of the dead, while others carried figures of soldiers in action, bayonets at the ready? Now we have computers, is there a way in which they express our values and aspirations too? Wars are still taking place: how might a modern artist – you – design a modern 'peace memorial'?

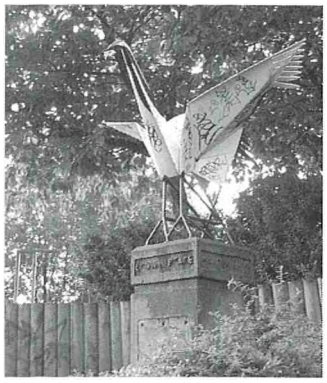
english Behind every memorial lies a story that can be reclaimed imaginatively. For example, children could write a story or poem as if they were the brother, sister or friend of one of the children in the Poplar raid described above; or they could imagine being a reporter for the local paper. Discussion of period detail to enhance the stories could involve the whole class, each child contributing a piece of research as a presentation.

science/technology Science, technology and new manufacturing methods made wars in the 20th century much bloodier. It wasn't that people were more aggressive: technology merely provided them with more destructive power. Talk about the uses to which we put technology, and who is, or ought to be, responsible for such decisions. As a project, suggest ways in which a selected piece of military technology could be 'converted' for peaceful use, with supporting illustrations/diagrams.

PSHE Not everybody thinks war is acceptable. Many people refuse to be conscripted because they believe it is wrong to kill people under any circumstances; they are called 'conscientious objectors', and in both World Wars many of them were sent to prison. The curriculum urges us to 'respect our common humanity'; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that we all have the right to life. Discussion of this apparent contradiction can help children to tackle moral, social and cultural issues, as the curriculum requires.



■ Children's memorial today and at unveiling.



■ A peace crane in the playground of Maygrove Peace Park in North London.

constructing peace

Providing opportunities for children to do something for peace is a practical way of putting many of the PSHE proposals into action. It also nurtures the habit of so doing. The story below can be used as a starting point for wide-ranging discussion and activities.

the story of the peace crane

The crane is Japan's national bird. The Japanese are famous for the art of paper-folding, called 'origami'. In Japan, it is said that a person who folds 1,000 paper cranes will have a long and healthy life.

On August 6, 1945, when Sadako Sasaki was almost 2 years old, an atom bomb was dropped by the American airforce on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Because her family lived on the outskirts, none of them was hurt. Sadako was a lively girl; she loved running and won many races. But 10 years after the bombing she became ill. She had leukaemia, which people began to call the A-bomb sickness because many other children like her also became ill.

In the hospital, Sadako decided to try to fold 1,000 cranes. It was easy at first but, as she became weaker and weaker, it became harder to make each fold. When she died, she had made only 644 cranes. Just before she died, she held up one of them and quietly said, 'I will write "peace" on your wings and you will fly all over the world.'

The story of this brave little girl spread and many people began to fold peace cranes to finish the job she'd begun. Today, a statue of a young girl stands in Hiroshima's Peace Park. The words carved at the foot of the statue say, 'This is our cry, this is our prayer: to establish peace in the world.'

Cherry tree in Tavistock Square, Lon those killed by nuclear weapons an world of war. Cherry trees have be try for similar reasons and are ofter the anniversary of the dropping of

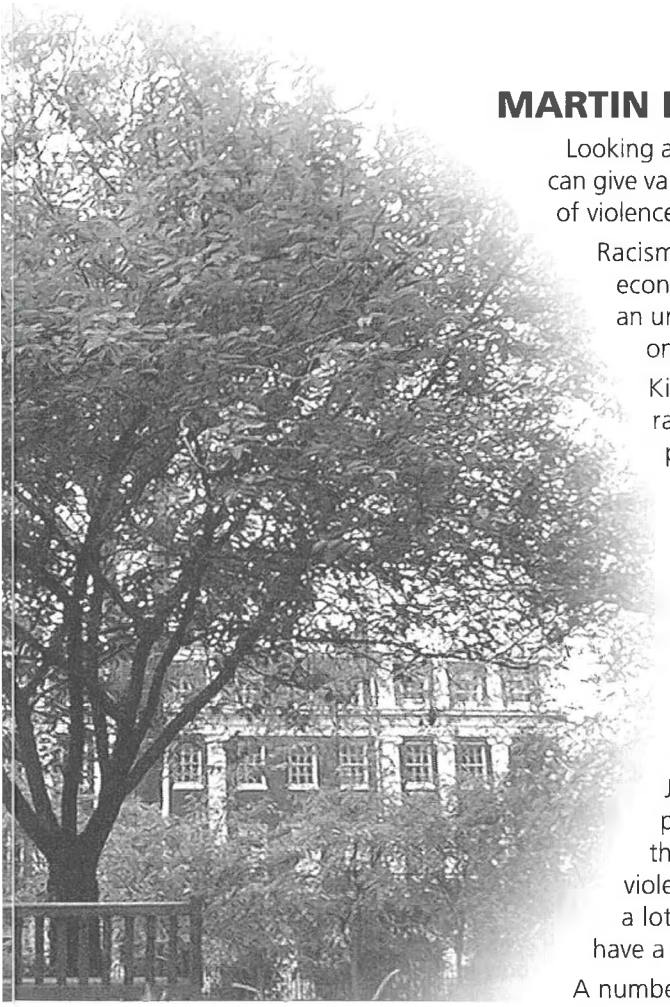
■ Sadako is in the centre of the front row

Each year on Children's Day, May 5, Japanese children visit the statue and cover it with thousands of paper cranes. They remember the children who died from the atom bomb and promise to do their very best to build a world of peace. And, in countries all around the world today, the paper crane is a symbol of peace and hope.

Activity

A class, or even the whole school, could carry out a project to promote a peace symbol, to be chosen because it has some special meaning for the children and teachers. Once chosen, it can be realised in a variety of inventive ways – art, writing, sculpture, T-shirts, school events, badges, etc., whatever is suitable. (This could be the culmination of a longer-term peace project.) The peace symbol could be launched at a special ceremony, perhaps on one of the several international Peace/Human Rights days. A peace-affirming event of this kind could become a regular feature of the school calendar.

supplementary information
pictorial description of how to make cranes; story of one school's crane project; information about nuclear weapons: www.ppu.org.uk/sno.html



don. Planted in 1966 to commemorate
cl as a commitment to work to rid the
en planted in other parts of the coun-
i the focus of ceremonies on August 6,
the first atomic bomb in 1945.

constructing peace

MARTIN LUTHER KING

Looking at the life and work of Martin Luther King can give valuable insights into the broader meanings of violence and nonviolence.

Racism is part of an interlocking set of social, economic and political values. At its centre is an uncaring indifference to people other than oneself or one's group.

King's courageous challenge to brutal racism, at that time deeply entrenched, particularly in the American South, was only one part of a wider humanising project. He also protested against the evils of poverty, and against the war in Vietnam; this work reflected his broader vision of a better world.

What do we really need from a superhero? Strong personal commitment, active social engagement and NONviolence.

January 15, Martin Luther King Day, is a public holiday in America. It is one of those rare days that celebrates a truly nonviolent person. We've already adopted quite a lot of American habits – so why don't we have a Martin Luther King Day as well?

A number of books about King, and suitable for young children, are available.

'That old eye-for-an-eye philosophy will leave us all blind.'

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Aung San Suu Kyi was elected leader of Burma in 1990, but the military rulers refused to release her from house-arrest or let her set up her civilian government as the people wished. Since then she has lived a hard life, separated from her family and knowing that the people who support her have been imprisoned and harshly treated. She has been frightened, hungry and cold. But never once has she stopped believing that the only way to resist oppression is a nonviolent way.

'We've chosen nonviolence because it is the best way to protect the people,' she said. 'If you use violent means, then people will think that only violent means can ever work. We want to break that cycle of violence.'

When she thinks of tyrants, 'I never imagine scenes where I'm getting my own back, giving them a nasty time and making them miserable. What I do imagine is a time when all this hatred has been washed away and we can be friends.'

What do we need from a superhero? Courage to endure hardship, care for other people, and NONviolence.

Suu Kyi (pronounced Su Chi) was born on June 19 1945. Perhaps you could find out more about her, and make June 19 another special day.

Peace

A match burns small, solitary...yet
useful in many ways.
A thought of peace in someone's
mind, small,
Isolated...yet quick, spreading like a
fire.
The match lights a candle
The thought touches another.

culture of war

A 'culture of war' is visible in the way we treat 'heroes of war' and 'heroes of peace'. Society doesn't seem to view peace-makers with the same admiration, even reverence, it gives to armed fighters. Statues and monuments to soldiers and battles are easy to find in most towns and cities. All of them convey images of heroism and courage. Statues and monuments to the people who have worked for, and achieved, peace, are noticeably absent. One could almost begin to think that peace wasn't what people wanted.

You don't see many nonviolent heroes and superheroes in comics and films, either. Most of them are lawless and violent. One could almost begin to think that the only way to do 'good' is with a uniform, big muscles, and lethal force.

At the Museum of Childhood in London, you can pick your own superhero – or supervillain – and take part in a painting project, even if you're no more than three years old. One could almost begin to think that being armed and powerful was the only way to get problems solved.

In the Museum of Childhood you can easily read the social, military and economic history of the country simply by looking at the toys. Who made the toys? Adults, of course, who may be keen to pass on their aspirations and ideals to their children. Modern toys can be a give-away as well. Have another look at the toys preferred by children you know, including the ones they wish they had. You might begin to think that play is a serious business closely linked with cultural attitudes to peace and war.

so what do you think?

Teachers struggle to do their job knowing that their political opinions and philosophical beliefs must be kept well clear of the curriculum: the perils of at least one sort of indoctrination are well known. Things aren't all bad. Non-violence is the culture schools are encouraged to promote, supported by policies on bullying, by mediation and democratic procedures, and, if you're lucky, by positive build-on-the-good-we've-got management. Non-violence is non-controversial in the context of local peaceability; the disturbed and the dangerous are cases for treatment, or excluded altogether. Sadly, there are still those who think such categories should contain people who want war abolished, instead of people who promote it.

We know we shouldn't attempt to bend children's political opinions to follow our own. But we should equip children to recognise indoctrination anywhere. In short, we shouldn't tell them what to think, we should teach them how to think in an organised and unprejudiced way. There are four indispensable approaches for children to learn, and they can start learning them early. (These exercises link well with literacy sessions.)

Teachers help children to practise clear thinking by using stories or topical issues or suitable news items. The issues and stories we ask children to discuss should be chosen because they raise questions right from the start. Michael Foreman's beautifully illustrated story War Game is a fine example: it's engrossing, informative and moving.

SUMMARY: Four teenage footballers are persuaded to fight in World War 1. Cheered along the way, at first they think it's an adventure, but then they meet miserable people coming away from the war-zone – unhappy refugee families, wounded and exhausted soldiers – and see how the countryside has been destroyed. Sent to the front, they endure hardship in the trenches, just 'a goal-kick away' from German soldiers suffering the same cold, rain, mud, rats – and casualties. But on Christmas Eve the guns fall silent. Germans put up Christmas trees and sing carols; the English boys and their mates join in, and together they bury their dead. On Christmas Day there's an exhilarating impromptu football game in No Man's Land. But soon the generals order the killing to start again, and the four young men's lives are over.

christmas in no man's land

illustration from the War Game. Pavillion.

four approaches to clear thinking

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT! Opinions and emotions need to be recognised and distinguished from facts. It may be a fact that 'I like this story', but it's a feeling that's being expressed. 'This is a story about war' is a fact, but could be an opinion too. Can you sort out the facts-included-IN-a-story from the facts-true-only- FOR-the-story?

IS THAT A FACT? Right, you've sorted the facts from the fancies, but where did each fact come from? Did it come from a source you can trust? Could it be an opinion, or a feeling, in disguise?

DON'T TAKE IT FOR GRANTED! Facts are sometimes used to PERSUADE us to believe things that may not always be true. People make wrong ASSUMPTIONS all the time. They make sweeping GENERALISATIONS as well. Learn about these three Thought-Tricks – and then you can ***spot*** them when other people use them, and ***stop*** yourself using them too.

IS THIS A QUESTION? Thinking things through means asking yourself (and others) questions, every step of the way. This can be fun, and can have very interesting results.

Here's a suggested approach to 'War Game' and other stories:

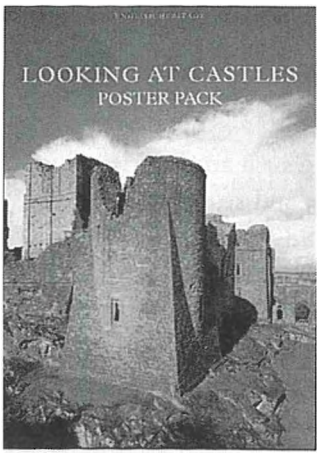
1. **'What does it mean?'** Make sure that the meanings of key words are understood and agreed.
2. **'Is the name right?'** Read the story and discuss the title.
   Other material may have headlines or sub-headings to discuss in the same way. If none, then suggestions can be invited.
3. **'The truth of the narrative'** Pick out key sentences, in order.
   E.g. :The army needed many thousands of young men to stop the Germans advancing.
   'Your King and Country Need You.'
   'An adventure – and home by Christmas.'
   Marching through villages and towns, the troops were cheered all the way.
   No more cheering crowds. Those people had seen war.

4 **'Put to the question'** After agreeing on the key sentences, discuss the meaning and implication of each one, through questioning.
   E.g.: What in FACT did the army want the young men to do?
   How did the poster PERSUADE many thousands of young men to go to war?
   What ASSUMPTIONS did the four boys make?
   What FEELINGS might the cheering have given them?
   What QUESTIONS might the people coming back from the war want to ask?

5. **'You tell me'** Share the retelling of parts (or all) of the story, using additional details discovered from research.
   In the case of 'War Game', find details by looking closely at the illustrations, including the recruitment posters, and the extra information provided about the front line.
6. **'Another point of view'** How might the story be told by different characters in it? Do any 'facts' seem to change?
   How might the 1914 war be seen by a German soldier? a refugee? an ambulance worker? a general? Alternative points of view can include those of people not appearing in the story you're working with.
7. **'Look again'** Re-read the story. What has been learned from it?
   Answers to this question will themselves need to be sorted into Facts, Opinions and Emotions, and may need liberating from Persuasion (including Prejudice and Propaganda), Assumption and Generalisation. They'll also throw up further questions to explore, constantly using the four basic approaches.

Learning to THINK,
not to quarrel.
Learning to THINK,
not to compete
Learning to THINK,
not to show off.
Learning to THINK,
not to accuse.

talking about war



Looking is one thing; understanding is more difficult. Walking round castles, touring former military sites, watching re-enactments of historic battles: activities like these are part of family days out. Pleasure, excitement, and a dash of education: good value.

Informative material provided by organisations managing these 'heritage' or 'museum' sites is indeed often excellent. But presentation of the sites and their histories almost always reinforces the feeling that war is an inescapable, often heroic, and legitimate part of the fabric of life. If and when that was ever the case, it was because people made it so: and we ought to find out why.

A challenge to children and adults of all ages.

Activity

Try spicing your visits to military strongholds and monuments with a more critical look at what brought them into existence. How much are they models of aggression, not signs of a wish for peace? How much do they represent people's past readiness to solve disputes by killing? What peaceful acts might have been more heroic? History is packed with struggles to survive against poverty, bad management, disease and the weather, struggles mostly unhonoured. Rewrite the guidebooks without giving war all the credit!

1. 'they're much too young for that'

Whether your children are growing up in war zones or many miles from them, war gets into their private lives. If it isn't going on outside, it's coming in with newspapers and magazines. It invades your living space from the television screen, via news reports, documentaries and films. Your home may also house war games on the computer, and possibly a war toy or two. Your young children hear adult conversation and reminiscences that may touch on war; maybe there's a member of the family connected to the armed forces or arms manufacture. Down the road there's probably a war memorial; an armed forces base or Ministry of Defence site may not be far away. Plaques, statues, and community buildings commemorate war and its soldiers; pubs, schools, streets and squares may be named after war leaders or battlegrounds. Tourist attractions frequently feature the military; museums and parade grounds honour them; your family may have picnicked in an old fortification, in the shadow of a monumental cannon or tank. War planes on exercises may swoop overhead almost daily, drowning your voices.

In this way public acceptance – even approval – of war is mediated directly to children. These records, reflections and signifiers of war are rarely questioned. They may not be the focus of attention, they may even sometimes be joked about. But significant or side-lined, how often are they properly explained to the young children for whom they are a familiar feature of personal and local life? "Oh, they're much too young to learn about such things."

Many people who want their small children to feel safe make a conscious effort to protect them from current news reports of war. 'Those people are doing horrid things. Let's watch a different programme.' 'Don't you pay any attention to those men with guns: you're safe here, don't you worry.' Effortlessly, children absorb the idea that people with guns are 'bad' – unless they are on 'our side'. After all, how can 'our' soldiers be anything but 'good'? They're protecting us, aren't they?

Armed resistance and armed aggression: both feature as commendable, albeit not pain-or tragedy-free, in almost all mythologies, histories, cultures, religions. What's more, war is the universal metaphor for life's persistence. Nature's elements war with each other; mankind fights weather and climate. We fight for breath when we are born, and go on fighting in order to survive: fighting against illness, fighting for opportunities, fighting to win. The traditional vocabulary of battle can be found in almost every area of human endeavour.

Struggle, certainly, is a feature of human life from the moment the child struggles out of the womb. However comfortable and unthreatened some lives may seem, there's a struggle going on somewhere. Maybe it's in the physical organism, as it struggles to grow, resist infection, handle pain. It may be in the mind, as it struggles to cope with experience, with community life and work, with human relationships, with the dictates of the state. It may be in both at once, as each unique individual struggles to explore its boundaries or improve its skills. Struggle, in fact, defines human life.

If, as we must, we accept the necessary struggles and conflicts that characterise life and its innate drive to survive, we should realise that it's all too easy to slide into accepting the unnecessary use of armed might, which aims to preserve life by death.

This is a transition which many people make. It's a transition which adults should be clear about in their own minds before talking to children about war.

Children should be protected from harm, but never from information. Parents and teachers have the task of helping children to grow up able to think and fend for themselves, able to develop their own sense of security. If they do, with encouragement from their significant adults, the next generation may also grow up to work out for themselves how futile, stupid, antisocial, destructive and inhumane war is. They may even take positive steps to root it out.

It's important to explain to children (especially young children) the meaning of the violence they see or hear about. Some parents are active in the peace movement or engaged in work that aims to make the world a better place: their children are more likely to view the future with confidence, and to believe that they can influence the world around them, to the good.

2. learning to talk

Children have feelings from the moment they are born. They can feel hungry, or cold, or tired, or bored. They can feel pain and pleasure. We might term these 'indicative' feelings. They indicate a physical or mental state with a clear correlative cause. Later, as children become articulate, they can see the direct relation between hunger and food, cold and warmth, tiredness and sleep, boredom and stimulation. They also learn about, and find words for, all kinds of pain and pleasure, and the known or likely causes of them.

Most of us know that few children seem 'naturally' to possess a moral sensibility. Information about what's 'good' or 'bad' is received by the child on the same level on which an apple is good or bad. Beyond that, they simply learn what the adults around them approve or disapprove of, and modulate their behaviour accordingly. Children also rapidly discover that while, say, hot things and cold things are always just that, and cause the same sensations, 'good' and 'bad' are flexible and capricious. What adults say are 'bad' things, for example, are sometimes enjoyable; 'good' things don't always bring pleasure. Sometimes 'bad' things are only bad if adults notice them; they may even be bad only sometimes, according to the adult's mood. The vocabulary of values needs to be handled with great care.

BIX: The nursery lady said I was a bad boy.
JAN: Did she, now. Do you know why?
BIX: I think 'cos I took Lara's bikky.
JAN: Oh, I see now: you were being Bix the Biscuit-eater again.
BIX: Yeeeeah!
JAN: Well, when the nursery lady said you were bad, she was telling you that you shouldn't take Lara's biscuit because it didn't belong to you. You got very cross when someone took yours the other day.
BIX: It was mine!
JAN: And the one you took was Lara's, and you shouldn't have. So she was cross. See? That's the way it works, darlin'! Maybe you should give her your biscuit tomorrow, to say sorry? That would be a good thing to do.

Dialogue with children must start when they are very young. A first step is the naming and discussion of 'indicative' feelings. Children need – and want – to understand clearly what the constants are in their experience of life. One of those constants is that each individual's physical sensations are roughly the same as everyone else's. 'Anya is crying because she hurt her knee when you pushed her. It hurts just like your elbow did when you fell off the swing.' 'The baby's smiling because he's just had a good feed. You know how nice that feels!' The idea of shared feelings is one to emphasise early – it's easier and more effective than saying 'It's wrong to hurt your sister', which conveys to the child not a constant truth (important) but a mutable attitude (unreliable).

Any discussion of war and violence needs to have these constants firmly in mind.

'How do you expect to work out your aggression in **that**?

'they need to be made aware'
'An exchange I had with two of our children when they were six and eight still stays with me. We were driving to a shopping centre. On the way we passed the factory of an aircraft manufacturer, whose main business was in military contracts. The children asked what kind of work people did there.

In answering their questions, I included my opinion about the defence industry. I said I wished a company like this would use more of its resources making commercial planes and other socially useful items. I said I wished they didn't make bombers and fighter planes. The responses of Tommy and David were straightforward: "We have to have bombs! We have to be able to get the enemy so they can't get us. Bombs will help us fight!"

As we talked, I became aware of two underlying themes in what my sons were saying. They saw the world with an "us against them" view; and they had little grasp of the totality of the destructiveness of war. They felt that somehow bombs would pick out the "bad people". It hadn't occurred to them that real bombs kill real children.

This experience occurred before the dramatic rise in violent toys and cartoons that are with us today. Today the situation is even more challenging: children see so much more violence, and with so little opportunity – or capacity – for understanding the real consequences. Somehow they need to be made aware that people don't get up again and walk away after they've been machine-gunned or bombed. While it isn't advisable to show pre-school children pictures of the devastation of war, they do need some injection of realism from us, perhaps a comment like, "Looking at bombs makes me feel very sad because I think of people being killed".'

And discussion should be initiated by the adult whenever the child is known to be observing any image of war and armed violence. (Which includes the small friend pointing a toy gun.) That these things have the power to hurt must be pressed home. If the child asks why these things are around if they hurt so much, your answer, should open a door to future dialogue. 'Yes, it is strange, isn't it. You know I don't like it. Some people don't care about other people getting hurt, I'm afraid. We care, though. We'll talk about it properly very soon. Come and have a cuddle.'

JOANNE: Your friend Tommy's left his blasted water-pistol behind.
MANDA: You took it away from him. Mum, why did you take it?
JOANNE: Well, it's made to look like a real gun, and guns are horrible things.
MANDA: Why?
JOANNE: People use guns to hurt other people with, and they get hurt very badly.
MANDA: Worse than when I shut my hand in the door?
JOANNE: Much worse. Worse than when I hurt my back and had to lie down all the time: you didn't like that at all.
MANDA: It was boring. And I didn't like it when you cried. Why do people hurt each other with guns?
JOANNE: Often because they're frightened and think they're going to get hurt themselves.
MANDA: Tommy's gun won't hurt anyone. It's fun. Everything gets wet.
JOANNE: Don't I know it! But it would be awful if Tommy found a real gun and thought it wouldn't hurt anyone. A real gun could hurt someone like that poor pheasant we found in the field the other day. That had been shot with a gun. Hey, come and cry on me, love.

3. getting deeper

As the child develops, other kinds of feeling develop, far more baffling than 'indicative' feelings. For example, there is a nightmarish area – described in many memoirs of childhood – in which there are things that 'feel bad' but the child does not know why. Children can feel threatened, unsafe, frightened, sad, without a threat or sorrow they can identify. (They can feel pleasure and excitement in the same way, of course.)

Sometimes this is because the correlative cause is simply not clear enough, perhaps because it is rooted in adult affairs and the impenetrability of adult motive and behaviour. Violence and war demonstrate adult contradictions to a child in a particularly damaging way.

We might call these new and more mysterious emotions 'subjective' feelings. They may be experienced by many other individuals, but unlike 'indicative' feelings they are associated with each individual's particular temperament. They are part of one's personal identity – as the human being all human rights agreements are intended to protect.

Helping each child to articulate these emotions, and to handle the expression of them, is the next stage of the dialogue about war. Children who miss out on this are profoundly disadvantaged. Primary schools work hard to provide vocabulary, and outlets of expression, too; but they can't (and it's not part of their brief) provide enough time and security for children to explore and discover privately how the words may apply to their experience. That's up to you at home.

Try thinking about 'subjective' feelings as being of two kinds. The first kind are 'responsive': your child feels frightened or sad inside, and may not even show these feelings, though suffering and confusion may be clear. Your job is to help the child

to talk non-specifically about inner feelings, and to make clear that confidences are safe with you. That is, if they are safe. Nothing should be offered as a promise unless its guarantee is rock-solid. Discuss in general what it's like to feel scared, vulnerable, victimised, betrayed. These conversations will bear fruit later on if, for example, your child becomes bullied.

MICK: Hi, what's that you're watching, son? Looks like a war.
SAM: It is a war. Bang bang bang.
MICK: People getting hurt? That's not so nice.
SAM: They aren't really hurt.
MICK: How do you know?
SAM: Are they really hurt, then?
MICK: 'Fraid so. Look, that bit's over now. Switch off, eh? Look, has anyone been hurting you?
SAM: .....There's a couple of boys. They.... I....
MICK: You come and sit over here and tell me about it. We'll work out what to do, OK?

It's also possible that your child may be the bully. The second kind of subjective emotion is 'active', and is aimed at other people. Feeling like hitting someone, feeling like hitting that one. Feeling like hurting somebody, feeling like hurting someone in particular, feeling like hurting you. ('Subjective emotions' of this kind of course include feeling like hugging and giving and caressing, just as the first kind include feeling happy and satisfied; but talking about war belongs to the dark side.)

Parent-child dialogue has to allow the child to speak and express freely: it's still not the time for moral argument ('It's wrong to hit people'). The better equipped children are to express and understand their own feelings, and the more they are encouraged to make this the first thing they do with them, the more emotionally strong and resourceful they will grow.

It's at this point you can introduce an important distinction when discussing war with a young child. The people the child has glimpsed at war in a TV news report, or in a war movie, are not doing so because they are emotional and hitting out. They are doing it because they have been trained and then ordered to do it.

Some children reach this point later than others. Certainly it's later rather than earlier that this question should be discussed: Why do some people choose to be trained to kill? The reasons nowadays are more complicated than they were historically (when armies were large and constantly in need of replenishment; when commanding them was a conventional career choice, and serving in them a readily available source of employment). Nowadays uniformed armed forces offer opportunities for employment to people who have few if any other options; and it's prospects of travel, education, adventure and public service, not killing, that attract recruits.

FIFA: I don't like watching the news. It's full of stuff with soldiers and people crying.
TITCH: I wouldn't mind being a soldier, zapping all the baddies.
MARIAM: I don't want my son to be a soldier, please Titch.
TITCH: Dad was a soldier. You said you were proud of him.
MARIAM: I was proud of him because he was a lovely gentle man.
FIFA: He was a soldier for our country, too.
MARIAM: Yes, and he hated doing it.
TITCH: I wouldn't hate it. I'd like it.
FIFA: That's awful. Why?
TITCH: People would look up to me, they'd step aside when they saw me with my big

here and now

'One way to give more empowering experiences to young people is not to ignore problems but focus on them and the future. "Where do we want to go?" " What sort of world do we want?"

This means developing young people's and children's capacities to dream and have visions. But having done that, it means coming back very much to the here-and-now, saying: "What does that mean about what I'm going to be doing in my community, in my school, at home, in relation to my local world, in relation to the wider world?"'

It may not be clear when watching the news that children are the principal victims in war.

'Be the best' says the Army recruiting slogan – but best at what?

gun, and kids would thank me for saving them from all the baddies I'd zapped.

MARIAM: Those baddies, you call them, they're all fathers with sons too. And if your dad hadn't been a soldier, he'd be here now. So go comfort your sister.

There are other kinds of soldier, of course, some of them also represented in toys and games as well as on film. These shouldn't be left out of discussion. Guerrillas, 'liberation fighters', mercenaries, private armies, militias and paramilitaries, religious war crusaders, ethnic cleansers, maverick tooled-up Robin Hoods, and the gangsters down the road: discuss whichever has caught your child's attention. The point is not to hone definitions of the fighting man, but to press home what they have in common: the willingness to kill. They may be willing to kill for reasons that might at first seem 'good' – loyalty, the protection of loved ones. Yet the basic human right is still the same for everyone: the right to live.

4. words and actions

By now your child is old enough to have acquired a good deal of experience the hard way. Before the age of nine at the latest most children will have learned all about sibling rivalry, the harsh world of the playground, peer-group pressures, adult inconsistencies, crime and punishment, and the real or potential violence of sport.

They also know that many people, and maybe themselves, find some aspects of violence peculiarly exciting, even enjoyable. And they've learned how difficult it is to handle anger.

What they won't have fully grasped, and don't need to, is the reality and finality of death. They may have seen pets die, they may have experienced bereavement; but children will recoil from directly addressing the idea of death, instinctively it seems. Talking about war and violence must continue to be focused on how war hurts and damages the living; how killing is done can be discussed only if it's clear the child is ready to. Stress on death can hinder discussion of war, and make children keep fears to themselves in order to avoid it.

ZENA: The news is bad again, Col.

COL: Yes, I know. We were talking about it at work. Some of the lads think they should be bombing the capital, I'm afraid.

ZENA: Hi Sammy. Come and watch the news. Did you talk about it at school?

SAMMY: They said we'd do some things to get money for the people who've not got homes any more.

COL: Refugees, that's right. That's good. You can see some news about them in a minute – they're doing a special report.

SAMMY: No. I'm going upstairs.

COL: Funny – I know Sammy watches on the telly upstairs.

ZENA: Upset by it all, perhaps?

COL: Doesn't show it. But maybe we've been overdoing the reality bit.

ZENA: Real life is important!

COL: Sure, but real death can get a bit too close when you're only eight years old.

JAK: Some of those refugees were only eight years old, and they didn't have any choice.

COL: But Sammy does, thank god.

ETHICAL INVESTMENTS?
The growth in popularity of 'ethical investments' – investments in companies and institutions which, for example, don't manufacture or sell arms or products designed for military use – shows a widespread concern about the destabilising effect of weapons, and a wish to do something about it.
An ethical dimension could be brought into children's play if violence-condoning toys and games are actively discouraged – something everyone can do.

JAK: But one ought to face things. I'd still be wanting to go in the army if I hadn't seen the news.

COL: Thank god again. But you're twelve now. Don't forget what it was like when you were young!

The most influential parental dialogue may not have much time left to run now. It won't be long before the most important views are those of your children's friends. Before that happens you need to be sure your maturing child understands another vital distinction. Wanting to hit someone is a feeling. Actually hitting someone is an action. It has different – even new – emotional and physical qualities. The wish is not at all the same as its fulfilment. Now the child can discuss 'I want to hurt you', and 'I hate', and see that the emotion isn't irresponsible as long as it isn't followed by aggressive action. Displacement activity – talking, hard exercise, finding something safe to punch the feelings out on – can be suggested and tried out. And so can the comfort of being held, safely and unjudged, in your arms. For some reason many adults very quickly forget how difficult life is for young children, for whom so much experience is new. At least, they forget while the children are young.

By now most children will have had some access to the words and actions of characters in films abut war, even if it's only trailers or the back end of a black and white World War Two movie on afternoon TV. Whatever they have seen, with or without your knowledge, it's time to discuss the whole business of enacting, or playing at, war.

You might be glad you've thought about the following questions before the heavy conversation starts:

- Why are war films – and war games – so popular? Why do people find them so enjoyable?
- Catharsis: in ancient times people went to see plays about risk in order to have experience without risk, and many went away feeling better. Why? Is this what war films do? All war films?
- The fact that films are performed by actors: does that make us, especially children, expect all war victims to get up and go home?
- Getting the taste for it: American soldiers in Vietnam were at first excited by finding themselves 'being in a movie' – except that people really died, and it was awful.
- The educational properties of fear and danger: do we seek them out to replace what were once commonplace hazards which we learned to survive?
- The excitement of risk, and the point at which bravery becomes stupidity.
- Having a hold over people: what sorts of insecurity, what sorts of temperament, breed the lust for it?
- Racist and other prejudice: what experience has your family had of it? Is it something you feel yourself? If it is, do you understand why, and does it affect your words and actions?

good question
'When the news comes on I put my hands over my ears. It's not nice the way men on TV talk about the war. They are sort of jolly and excited – why are they like that?'
Young child during Gulf war.

5. 'power corrupts'

As the children begin their journey towards secondary school, where some or all of these issues will appear in the syllabus, in the English lesson, in the canteen, in the bus home, and on the televisions in their rooms, there's one last issue that must not be left alone.

It is the question of power.

Good parenting means that throughout a child's first decade his or her idea of morality is acquired by good example. The capacity for abstract thought is limited in the

very young; real learning to live is done by experience rather than precept. The good parent provides a safe environment for their children first as a learning-ground and later a resource for rest and repairs. Children observe their parents closely: whether or not they find words to say so, they notice whether their significant adults are caring or not, consistent or not, loving or not, loveable or not, pacific or not. And they readily pick up prejudices as truths.

Children are more cynically alert to the emotional manipulation practised by many adults, of themselves or others. It's their first lesson in the malice of power, and it is hard to unlearn. Further – and often painful – lessons come from the power structures developed in the peer group, in school, in the community, in the social, cultural and religious centre. In their own environments children learn what it's like to want power, get power, wield power – and be overpowered. Here's another distinction: between having power over people, and being empowered to be a confident individual who doesn't need it.

Because it's an issue in every aspect of life, the problem of power needs to be discussed at every opportunity. It also needs to be discussed in the context of war, because wars are started by leaders, and we may have chosen them.

Parents, being authorities themselves for a while, need to know in their own minds where they stand as far as authority is concerned. Is it to be slavishly obeyed? Is it to be questioned, and if so, how? What do we want of government, and do we get it? Simpler forms of these questions can then be put to the children, who have their own questions to ask about authority. Your role now is not to provide the answers but to empower the children to work the answers out later for themselves.

You have one substantial resource in this difficult enterprise: books. Shared with the children, at any age, they can then be discussed in their narrative terms. ('What would you have done?' 'That must have been scary!' 'What do you think made her so cruel?' 'Let's think what might happen next.' 'What could they have done to stop it ?' 'Could we have been as brave as that?') What is more, the discussion can be picked up at any time, and your children's feelings can be expressed through their talk about the characters. Much of the best work written specifically for young people, from picture books and first readers right up to teen fiction, raises most of the issues you have to handle as the children you care for grow up. There are excellent stories dealing with victims of war and oppression, with heroism and non-violent courage, with dysfunctional or warring groups and societies, with aggression and violence, with emotional problems, with fear and bullying, with brutality and bereavement. A glance at the summary on the back cover or flyleaf will quickly indicate whether this is the right source book for your child. The local library will also help, and so will book shops and the Internet.

And so will other people. Share these problems and issues with other parents and teachers; find or set up a group that meets regularly; put your heads together to tackle the issues of war and violence; join or begin a relevant campaign; write stories about non-violent resolution of conflict for your children. All these can provide welcome back-up to the difficult and fascinating business of helping children grow up to make a peaceful world. The children will notice what you're doing, and remember.

catching them young

The Atomic Weapons Establishment is funding laboratories for use by 40 primary schools in its neighbourhood.

'We want to see more scientists for the future because we are a scientific institution,' says Robin Bradley, AWE chief executive. 'We're serving our needs for the future by making sure that more people come into science.'

Including nuclear scientists to work on weapons programmes?

'Yes, maybe.'

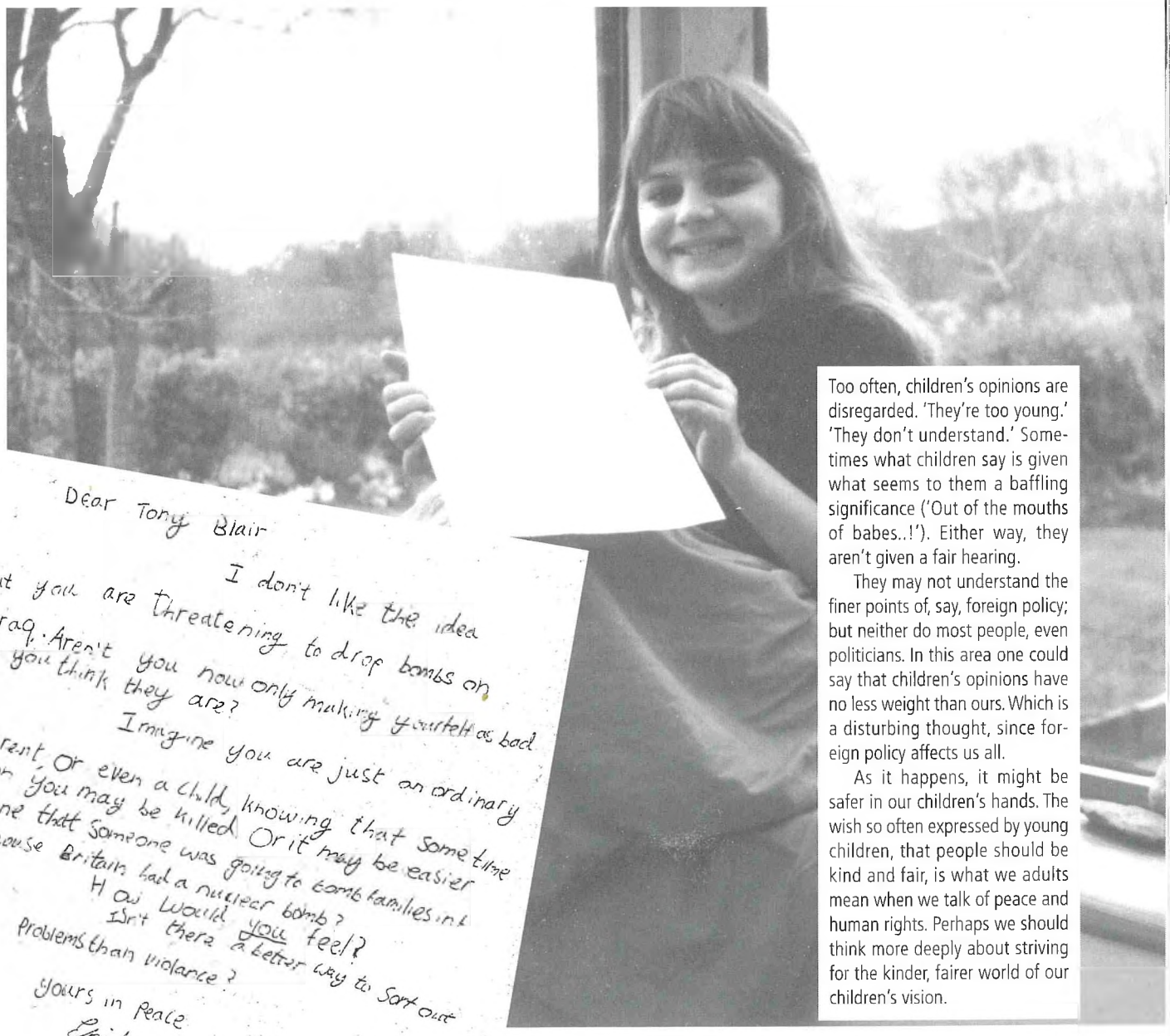
They may not be offering foundation courses in nuclear physics but the inescapable implication is that nuclear weapons are OK and here to stay. Not the most cheerful view of the future.

Emily's letter

That young children respond differently to the violence and war that they see or hear about on the news is a well observed phenomenon. When the US and Britain threatened to bomb Iraq many children became fearful, afraid that bombs were going to be dropped on them and that they and their families were going to be hurt or killed. During the Gulf war this became a major problem.

Of course, not all children react in the same way. Eleven year old Emily, whose letter is reproduced below, responded quite differently and took a far more creative and no doubt psychologically more comfortable route.

Emily's mother insists that she in no way encouraged the writing of this letter but while she may not have instructed her daughter to put pen to paper she is in all likelihood responsible for the letter landing on some desk in Downing Street.



Dear Tony Blair

I don't like the idea that you are threatening to drop bombs on Iraq. Aren't you now only making yourself as bad as you think they are?

Imagine you are just an ordinary parent or even a child, knowing that some time soon you may be killed. Or it may be easier to imagine that someone was going to bomb families in Britain because Britain had a nuclear bomb?

How would you feel?

Isn't there a better way to sort out problems than violance?

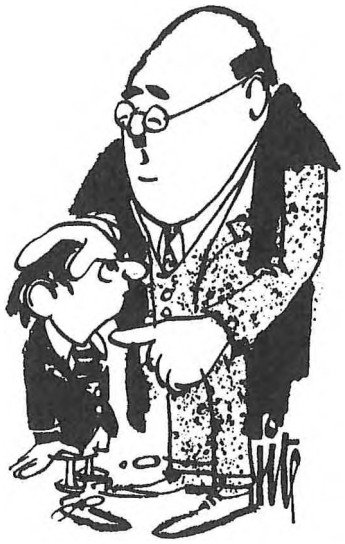
Yours in Peace

Emily Freeman

Too often, children's opinions are disregarded. 'They're too young.' 'They don't understand.' Sometimes what children say is given what seems to them a baffling significance ('Out of the mouths of babes..!'). Either way, they aren't given a fair hearing.

They may not understand the finer points of, say, foreign policy; but neither do most people, even politicians. In this area one could say that children's opinions have no less weight than ours. Which is a disturbing thought, since foreign policy affects us all.

As it happens, it might be safer in our children's hands. The wish so often expressed by young children, that people should be kind and fair, is what we adults mean when we talk of peace and human rights. Perhaps we should think more deeply about striving for the kinder, fairer world of our children's vision.



'That book we found you reading has corrupted me.'

practical approaches to story-telling

the facts

Conflict is essential to life. Everyone meets opposition and obstacles in the course of a lifetime; many meet oppression as well. Conflict is also essential to almost all drama and most fiction. Considering our long tradition of solving disputes with armed violence, images of armed conflict have long had the power to excite and entertain.

The concept of disposing of things by annihilating them is discovered early in life. You'll have seen a baby distressed when she throws a toy where she can no longer see it, and how delighted she is when it's retrieved; she'll repeat the process over and over for as long as someone's willing to join in. You'll have seen a toddler get rid of something unwanted, or 'tidying up', simply by throwing the object over his shoulder and out of sight.

Soon children notice that their destructive play (including zapping malevolent beings on the computer screen) is mostly balanced by regrowth, repair, or replacement. And, of course, in stories and plays and cartoons nothing is 'really' hurt or 'really' dead, so it's easy for the very young to assume that life is like that too. Killing and death are difficult to discuss with young children, because they are biologically programmed to be unready for it. And who wants to spoil that?

the bad news

Ancient, classic or modern, much of the literature and drama that is regarded as children's acceptable heritage also says OK to violence. You know that already, having grown up with them yourself. In addition, there is the problem of science fiction/fantasy and their conventions of violence. But you can't (and indeed shouldn't) keep children from their literature; and you have only a few years in which to prepare them for alternative thinking.

the good news

In fact there's quite a lot. There are culturally, if not politically, signs of a decline in the glorification of things military, signs of increased respect for co-operation. Schools implement anti-bullying and anti-violence policies; and disputes there are handled by the children's own mediators who have been taught to defuse explosive situations. Many children are now learning by experience the moral value and practical effectiveness of negotiation.

All this is reflected in much of the high-quality reading material for children currently available. It deals positively with issues of conflict, violence and the causes of war, and there's a wide selection, from first picture books to transition-to-teens fiction. The best books helpfully explore the destructiveness, rage and hostility which we all experience, and which many children can encounter on a daily basis. Such books provide a valuable contrast to the mass-market comics, games and other material which exploit violence as a stimulant.

ideas

Every conflict has causes which can be traced, in fiction and out of it: get talking about these as you read stories or initiate play-making. Often the more remote causes are more significant than the immediate triggers.

'You may have to choose between two evils, such as oppression and violent rebellion against it.' So people, even archbishops, often say. Not so: there are seldom only two evils to choose from, and always at least one good. Discuss with the children how,

for example, walking away need not imply weakness or disregard. Walking away can be a first brave step towards finding a non-violent solution, and away from the violent circle of retaliation and revenge.

Seize odd moments to practise alternative thinking yourself. Turn conventional ideas on their heads (suppose it was polite to turn your back). Experiment with scenarios (suppose killing was universally banned – how should ban-breakers be dealt with?). Put up arguments against your own point of view. Try changing your behaviour in small ways (smile when you're irritable? No, of course not: you do that already).

child's play

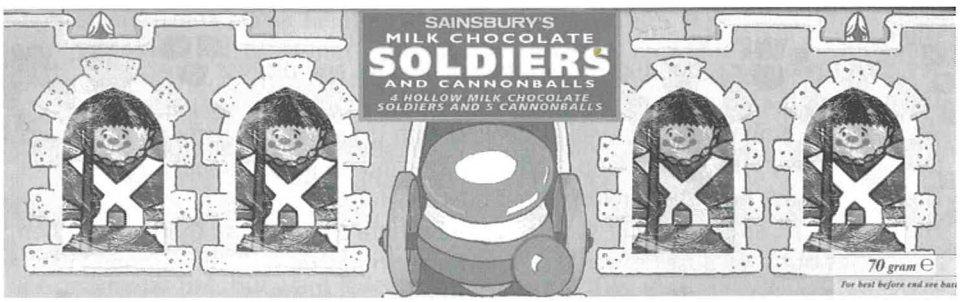
Reading the classics with children: be ready to rethink and retell. (No disrespect to the authors.) Instead of Narnia's 'Last Battle', what could happen that was just as exciting and moving? In what other ways than whacking could the weasels ('The Wind in the Willows') be dealt with? Even if you haven't got answers, persistence in asking the questions is a lesson in itself. However exciting the conflict being described, in the end, it's exciting to survive and not at all exciting to be dead. Watch out for stereotyped villains, too: like violence and militarism, they appear in even the most respectable books.

Storytelling: whenever you can, make this interactive, with the child/ren providing input of detail and gaining a feeling of control and responsibility for and in the story. (Later on you can discuss the differences between control and power, especially with regard to SF/fantasy interactive readers and games.) If the children only want to listen, check your material.

Drama/improvisation/mime/enactment: teachers already know how to use these to channel the children's real-life problems, and to provide an imaginary, non-violent world as a refuge and resource. Use them also to undo and redo existing storylines from history or fiction, and to work out non-violent responses to real-life conflict situations – which will need eye-opening research.

In all these activities, keep the discussion going. 'Suppose we agreed that physical violence was ALWAYS wrong, then...?' 'Costa Rica has disbanded the army and is spending the money on environment projects. Suppose we did that ...?'

Some parents are understandably anxious about pantomimes and Punch & Judy shows. Some children don't like them either, but they need to know what they are, if they are part of their culture. On the whole the treatment of violence as absurd or comically grotesque is sufficiently distant from real life. But keep the questions coming. Raising questions is always preferable to simply expressing disapproval, and has the most lasting results.



Can violence be this sweet? Too many manufacturers make straight for military themes to attract children, making them confident that armies are an accepted part of life, and, what's more, associated with pleasure. It's not as if there's a shortage of less subversive packaging. A sports team and footballs, for a start. It's worth writing to the suppliers/manufacturers of products like these, indicating that you're about to get up a petition....

storylines

There are plenty of ideas in the books on your local library/bookshop shelves, and you will have some yourself, but here are a few simple scenarios to be going on with.

Invite your listener/s to contribute details and descriptions, dialogue and data. Afterwards they might make some illustrative drawings and paintings, and act out part or all of the story – perhaps turning it into a play, with text devised by the children.

big frog, small pond (5 – 7)

Big Frog bullies the newts, who aren't afraid.
Big Frog says he is King of the Pond, so the newts tell the Pond Life to bring their complaints to Big Frog, who rapidly gets fed up.
Big Frog still wants to be King, and gets a band of frogs to attack Pond.
In the attack the Pond is badly damaged.
The frog army looks at it with disgust and loses interest.
The newts ask sad Big Frog to say the Pond must be helped back to life.
The Pond Life comes back to start clearing up the mess.
But it's summer: the Pond dries up. The newts rescue sick Big Frog.
They move to a running stream, where Big Frog gets well again.
Now he wants to be King of the whole stream, but the newts show him that it belongs both to no-one and everyone.
A salamander makes friends with Big Frog, and he forgets all about wanting to be king of anything.

stakes and stones (5-8)

The marsh people swim and sail, and eat duck eggs.
The hill people walk and climb, and eat hen's eggs.
The rain stops falling in the hills, and the marshes dry up.
The marsh people think the hill people have drained the water.
They prepare sharpened stakes to fight the hill people with.
The hill people think the marsh people want their hen's eggs.
The hill people collect sharp stones to throw at the marsh people.
Two woodfolk ride up on ponies, and discover the two peoples' mistakes.
The woodfolk explain the mistakes to both peoples, and offer the use of a woodland spring until the rain comes.
The hill people, used to walking, offer to fetch the water.
The marsh people, used to boatbuilding, offer to provide buckets.
Together they invent the first rainwater butt, made with the marsh people's stakes.
Together they dig the first reservoir, lined with the hill people's stones.
They swap eggs and have a party to share their recipes.

a visit from outer space (8-10)

An ambassador from another planet makes a formal visit to Earth.
The military are particularly anxious to meet the ambassador.
The generals ask questions about the foreign planet's armaments.
Yes, says the ambassador, they have everything they need to deal with recovery after natural disasters.
The generals ask about guns.
Yes, says the ambassador, they have guns for lifelines and distress flares.
The generals ask about army activity.
Yes, says the ambassador, as well as dealing with disasters and recovery afterwards, the army is very busy on the land, both at home and on international projects.
The generals ask how the foreign planet prepares for conflict.
The army's task, says the ambassador, is to investigate conflicts and then defuse them. It searches out the causes of conflict – and puts things right. If this is done in time, problems are solved before anyone gets hurt.
The generals, now very impatient, ask 'But what about war?'
'War?' says the ambassador, 'What is war?'

Perhaps it won't be too long before we've forgotten the answer. Good luck!

Six-step storytelling for young children at home

Here's a simple storyline as an example.

A giant threatens a gnome, but the gnome ignores it.
The giant gets together a team of giants, so as to be even more threatening.
The gnome invites lots of gnomes to a party.
The giants (who don't have parties) prepare for war.
They begin to attack the gnomes.
The gnomes slip away, leaving the party food behind.
The giants wait for them to come back, but get bored.
They eat up the food and burst the balloons, and then go away.
The gnomes come back and have another party with even better balloons.
The gnomes say they'll go on doing this until the giants find out that parties are more fun than fighting.

The following steps (which also help develop children's mental skills) can be spread over several sessions. They can be applied to other conflict stories which you tell or read. You can also choose suitable items of news.

STEP 1: JOINING IN Invite your child to help you with the story. Why might the giant threaten the gnome? What are the giants and gnomes like? (They don't have to be what the names 'giant' and 'gnome' suggest, do they?) What's the gnomes' party like? How do the giants prepare for battle? What do the giants feel when they find the gnomes have gone? What do they do when they're bored? Hey, what would be an even better party?

STEP 2: RUN THAT PAST ME AGAIN Invite the child to retell the story back to you, discussing the details and getting the sequence of events clear.

STEP 3: LET'S IMAGINE Suppose the gnome had made the giant angry in the first place? Suppose the gnomes hadn't disappeared? Suppose the gnomes had invited the giants to their party? How might you persuade the giants that parties are more fun than fighting? Can you imagine people you know behaving like the giants and gnomes?

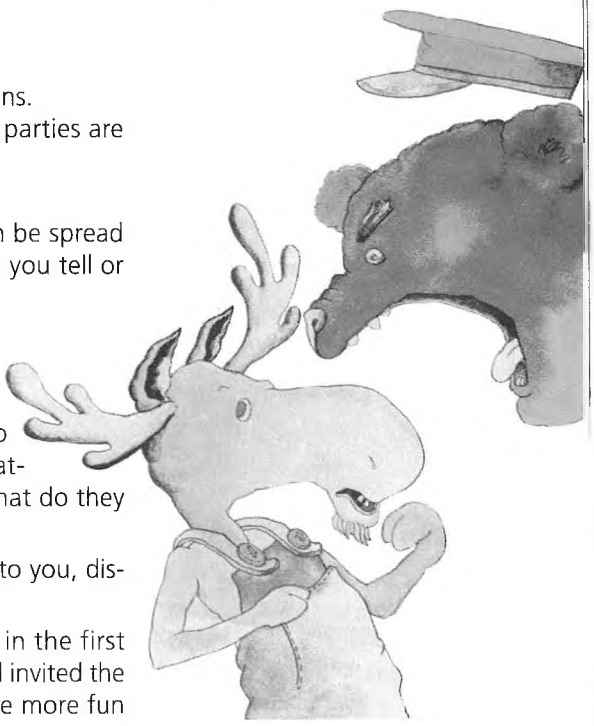
STEP 4: LET'S PRETEND Take it in turns to be a kind gnome and a cross gnome, a friendly giant and a belligerent one. Act out conversations between gnomes, and between giants, then between gnomes and giants, based first on the story and then on the LET'S IMAGINE discussion.

STEP 5: LET'S THINK When lots of people get together, when is it fun and when is it frightening? Think about being in a war: what would be the worst thing? Planning war, planning a party – what's the difference? Wars and parties are both events which people choose to make happen. How could we persuade people not to choose wars? What's the sensible thing to do when people disagree and feel they want to say so violently – just like you do sometimes? Those giants and gnomes – what would be a fair solution to their quarrel, and how might it be brought about?

STEP 6: OLD STORY, NEW ANGLE Challenge yourself and your child to retell the story together in other ways. Maybe it's the giants who are partying. Maybe the giants don't like gnome-parties, but want to learn to have fun in their own way. (Would they invite the gnomes?) Every story has lots of different points of view, and lots of different possible outcomes.

AND

Every story that has a battle in it can be a story without one.



'Why are you shouting at me?' But Bear was shouting at Eagle.
Moose finds nonviolent ways of dealing with angry animals when he's caught in the cross-fire.
Illustration from 'Moose' by Michael Foreman.

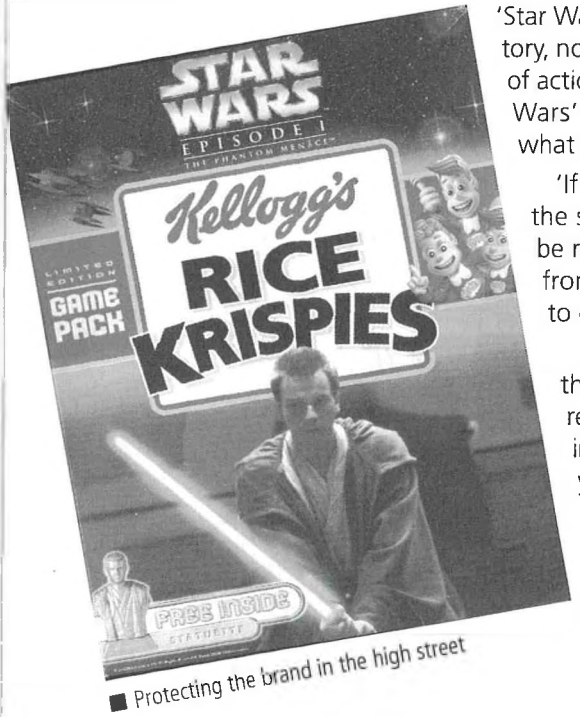
marketing war and violence

'In a desperate action to win back freedom from the Trade Federation™ stronghold, Naboo Fighters™ from Bravo Squadron™ face a mission against near-impossible odds to destroy the Trade Federation Droid Control Ship™ high above their planet.'

This quotation from a recent Rice Krispies packet is part of an introduction to a 'Star Wars' board game enclosed with the Krispies. It sets the scene: there's no history, no future, only the present; and in the present there's only one possible course of action – destruction. So clear is the narrative, we need never have heard of 'Star Wars' to know exactly what it's about, who the goodies and baddies are, and what the outcome is going to be. Violence will triumph once again.

'If 2 fighters from the same side', the game's instructions explain, 'land on the same square at the same time, their strength is doubled and they cannot be removed from game play by the opponent. This builds teamplay, as fighters from the same side can assist each other in their mission.... Fighters, prepare to engage in battle!'

Teamplay and co-operation are keenly promoted by peace educators, but they can be found in contexts that are not peaceful at all. The co-operation required, for example, to produce nuclear weapons is considerable. Teaching co-operation, conflict resolution skills and respect for others, especially to young children, is vitally important. Just as important are the contexts in which we place these things as we teach them. 'Respect for others' is the key element; its development is ill-served by a daily diet of images that condone violence instead.



■ Protecting the brand in the high street

from fantasy to reality

'Star Wars' projects the image of a bleak future in which wars are fought not only in the countries of Earth but also throughout the galaxy. According to this view, violence and war won't have succeeded in bringing about a future peace. Unintentionally the movie makes it clear that, after all, war and violence are not a viable solution.

Former US President Ronald Reagan's plans for an anti-ballistic missile shield in space (nicknamed Star Wars, of course) carried the same message: the project (until it was cancelled because of technical problems) actually brought the prospect of a USA/USSR nuclear confrontation closer. Plans for reviving the project have renewed international tensions.

Britain houses some of the systems components.

Concept toys and the rise of branding were a major shift in the control of play away from children and into the hands of toy corporations

the visible persuaders

In the 1950's, with the advent of commercial television, the BBC felt the cold wind of competition. With competitive pressure, television's approach to children began to change. BBC Children's TV characteristically offered a secure, homelike on-screen ambiance, assuming a responsibility to protect the innocence of the country's children while educating them as well. But children now had a choice of viewing and they quickly became active consumers – and not only of television. Each channel had to persuade its viewers to be faithful; the BBC's Muffin the Mule, one of the earliest TV/toy marketing tie-ins, led the seductive way.

The 1980s saw an explosion of such TV/toy link-ups. Instead of a varied, inventive range of playthings,'concept toys' and 'brand names' became, and still are, the overriding concern of TV companies and toy manufacturers. This marked a major shift in the control of 'play', away from children and into the hands of the toy corporations who profit hugely from toy 'lines' and high-profile brands. Children are made to feel that possessing specific toys is 'cool' – and essential for playing the games linked with them. Each toy comes with its own built-in sales drive. 'Action Man' ('GI Joe' in

the US) has over 50 associated items, and is designed to change every two years. To play 'Star Wars', children 'must' own the whole range of action figures, light swords and the rest. 'Star Wars' is no longer merely a movie, it's a mass-marketing concept, and a highly successful global system for extracting money from our pockets.

'Action Man' T-shirts, 'Star Wars' breakfast cereals, lunch-boxes decorated with 'Transformer' images: today's children dress, eat, brush their teeth and go to sleep in the gaudy glow of violence-condoning toys, logos and brand images. Steady exposure to this symbolic representation of an adult world in which role models (mainly male) handle conflict aggressively, often with hi-tech firepower, is likely to have a cumulative and disabling effect: it can seriously undermine a child's chances of growing up with pro-social skills such as conflict resolution literacy.

It's a grim picture, from which fun has vanished. 'Character licensing' is a prime marketing opportunity; brand licenses and advertising circulate violent images worldwide; marketing trends grow more insidiously exploitative of insecurities, with brand-line toys promoted as part of a must-have 'lifestyle' package; and toys themselves are less and less conducive to creative play, co-operative learning and social imagination. Entertainment or pleasure are incidental; and the plight of the Third World workers (many of them children) who make these toys has no importance at all.

Extensive research, and the experience of parents, reveals how television leads children to acquire the attitudes and skills of consumerism. Children quickly learn to understand advertising and link it to their purchases and gift-requests. Many toys now reflect essential elements of consumer ideology, and acquaint children with the social dynamics of a consumer market. The intensification of marketing, especially television promotion of character toys, significantly alters what children learn through play. The challenge now for parents, teachers and schools is serious and urgent, and it's this: the most common and most powerful images marketed to children, and particularly to boys, are violent.

■ Protecting the brand in Seattle during protest against the world trade talks

not suitable for children

The complexities of world trade aren't suitable subjects for young children to study. But we adults need to be aware of the effects of our national purchases. Many people on the other side of the world find themselves the victims of global trade. Their economies may become unstable. Threats to livelihood (or the desire for similar wealth) bring conflict and can lead to war, as events in South East Asia, for example, have shown.

Activity

▸ Ask children to provide examples of violence-condoning toys and games. Discuss and agree on a working definition of 'violence-condoning' – maybe thinking up a snappy collective noun for the toys and games in that category.

▸ Explain that some people are worried about violence-condoning toys and games: it's possible they make us feel or think that some kinds of violence are acceptable. How might they do this? Ask the children to say what they think. This could be followed by a structured debate, using ideas collected during the discussion.

▸ If most of the class think that 'v-c toys' are undesirable, suggest that they organise a campaign encouraging other people to stop using such playthings. The project can be simple or wide-ranging, as children and teachers decide. It can provide excellent practice for many KS2 skills, through design and distribution of leaflets and posters, surveys, a whole-school debate, performance art, sound/camera recordings, etc. The whole school could work towards a Peace Week.

▸ Ideal curriculum activity for **Key stage 2** *English, Information and Communication Technology* and *PSHE.*

what about the workers?

At the beginning of the 21st century China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have a 50% stake in the global toy market. India is building two new toy cities – yes, cities – in an attempt to seize some of this expanding market. The major toy corporations are American; the majority of workers are Asian. The corporations' air-conditioned HQs contrast starkly with the pitiful and dangerous conditions in which their factory employees work. High unemployment and low wages for the workers mean that child labour can often be a deciding factor in whether their families survive or become destitute – as many have.

advertising is not just for christmas

embedded
Children may know the difference between TV programmes and advertisements (though it's not always made easy for them), but if the programme has a message it's likely they will swallow it. At the University of Wales a project on improving children's eating habits has used a video showing hero-style children knocking back the fruit and veg. Shown in the classroom with appropriate encouragement and stickers, the video apparently does the trick. 'Within the first days of the intervention you see a dramatic shift,' said Professor Fergus Lowe. 'One minute they refuse to eat kiwis because they're disgusting and slimy, but after a couple of hours of intervention they're changing. We've had kids pestering their parents for broccoli.' Advertising isn't just a less-than-a-minute slot on commercial TV, it's everywhere – embedded in our culture.

Views on the ethics of TV advertising aimed at children vary widely in Europe. In Sweden it's considered unacceptable and is banned for children under 12, with the approval of the majority of the population. In France advertisements are seen as part of preparing children for future life in a consumer society. Greece has a ban on TV advertisements for children's toys between 7 am and 10 pm and a total ban on advertisements for war toys.

In the UK, restrictions exist on advertisements that 'might result in harm to children physically, mentally or morally' or employ methods that 'take advantage of the natural credulity and sense of loyalty of children'. Advertisements should not 'exhort children to purchase or to ask their parents or others to make enquiries or purchases'.

Children's reactions to advertisements can be very different from those of grown-ups. If adults see a product advertised and don't find it when they go shopping, they often forget about it. As children develop the ability to recognise and understand advertisements and their purpose, they start making demands. If these demands aren't fulfilled, the infamous 'pester power' kicks in. It's difficult to explain to young children the reasons why they cannot have everything which – according to advertising – is 'for them'.

Research by advertising agencies has confirmed that children's personal preferences can be targeted and changed by TV advertising. Family dynamics are thus affected by advertisements which create demands and provide children with arguments why they should want or 'need' a particular product; this can make life extremely difficult for parents who for financial or moral reasons refuse to comply.

Swedish public opinion considers advertising to children to be 'not fair play'. Besides the ban on advertising to children under 12, the law prohibits shops from setting up displays of sweets within reach of little children, and stipulates that attention must be paid to problems that could arise while parents are waiting in queues. Sweden wants to extend its advertising policy to the rest of the EU and the toy industry is running scared. It feels under threat because TV advertising is seen as a major factor in the choice and purchase of toys. According to a GMTV research project, 91% of pre-school children's mothers buy their children what they ask for if it isn't too expensive; and 32% of them believe that TV advertisements are the most important influence on their children's choice.

a matter of choice
In Spain banning advertisements is thought undemocratic. What about tobacco advertising, though? Tobacco companies are legally prevented from persuading us that it's cool to smoke despite being damaging – maybe fatally – to our health. Advertising doesn't potentially kill children, but it's worth asking what public freedom would be lost, or what the public disadvantage would be, if children weren't exposed from an early age to TV advertisements. The companies who advertise do so for profit; concern for children's moral and social well-being is much lower down on their priority list.

ambivalent about violence ✓

This activity is best done over a period of a few weeks. Show the class samples of promotional material which uses violence/violent language in its broadest sense and ask the class to collect as many examples of such material as they can. Remind them periodically to bring material in, comment on it and share 'unusual' examples. Suggest they ask their friends, relatives and younger and older children in school to help collect material.

When sufficient material has been collected make a display of it so that the full extent can be seen by all. Give everyone an opportunity to say what they think about the use of violence to sell products. If we agree that violence is bad why does it appear to be OK to use 'violence' to promote products. What would be an unacceptable way to promote products?

Ask children to choose some of the promotional material and suggest they show how it might be alternatively promoted.

The class could write to the manufacturer and advertisers asking them why they use violence to promote their products, or to make their objections known.

▶ Ideal curriculum activity for **KS2** *English, Information and Communication Technology* and *PSHE*.

a case study

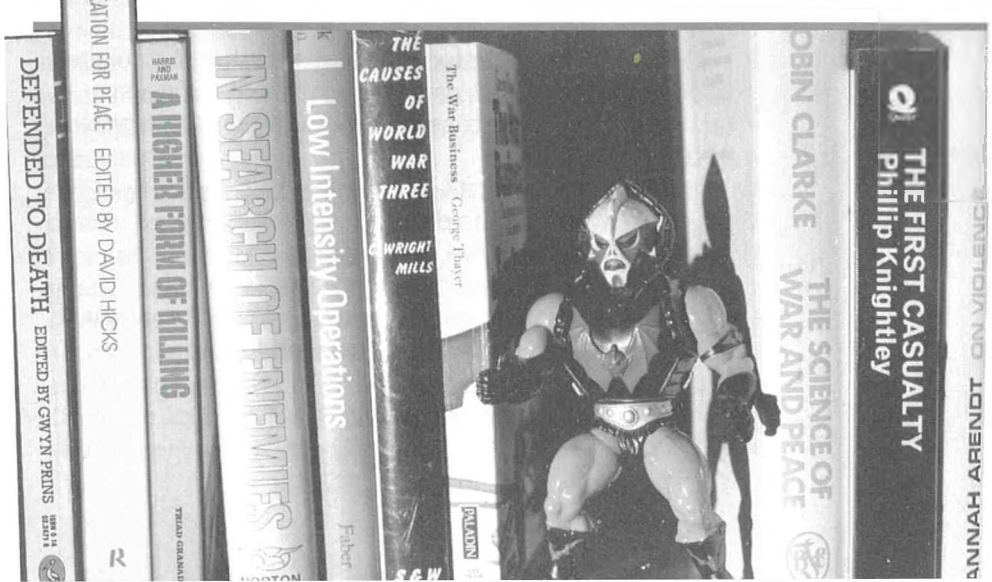
In 1997 following the killings at Dunblane, the Co-operative Wholesale Society issued a leaflet entitled 'Toys of Violence'. This says: 'War toys are considered by some to be inextricably linked to violent behaviour and the cause of escalating violence in modern society.' Its main points are summarised in the box below.

Values involved

It's no hardship for a retailer not to sell toy guns, swords, knives and bows and arrows. These, generally low-value items, form a minuscule proportion of violence-condoning playthings, unlike the 'balanced range' the CWS says it has on sale. The Co-op's position, like the toy industry's in general, is that (a) there is no evidence of a link between toys and violence; (b) whatever influences a child's behaviour it isn't them; and (c) they are providing a 'balanced range' of toys 'which contribute to constructive play'.

The full leaflet ends like this: 'Given the background of uncertainty that persists, the Co-op has chosen to adopt a more cautious approach in its toys selection.' – which appears to mean that it will continue to sell violence-condoning playthings. But uncertainty is not the issue. What would the Co-op's position be on selling, say, a toy 'torture kit'? There is no available evidence that such a toy would turn children into torturers, so there should be no objection to selling it. The Co-op remains stubbornly silent on this question. Most people who have no objection to the sale and promotion of violence-condoning playthings would object to the idea of selling toy torture kits. Why? The answer lies in society's collective values. Torture is abhorred, so toys imitative of it would be widely seen as abhorrent too. Here perhaps we can see at least a starting point for dialogue with those who are indifferent to violence-condoning toys, and even the beginning of greater resistance to them. Why should one form of violence be unacceptable, and the other sanctioned?

As no other major retailer has to date issued a statement on 'violent, war or aggressive toys', it may seem unfair to criticise the CWS, which did at least see that one was called for. But the CWS lays itself open to criticism the moment it mentions a 'duty to act responsibly'. At that point its leaflet appears to be no more than a public relations exercise.



CO-OP VIEWPOINT

The Co-op recognises the role of play in the healthy development of children.

We aim to sell a balanced range of toys, with the emphasis on those which contribute to constructive play.

We do not sell weapons, replicas of weapons, or representations of instruments of violence, which we define as guns, swords, knives, bows and arrows and the like. We do however provide a balanced range of toys which promote learning and development within play. We therefore sell fantasy figures such as Action Man, Batman and Power Rangers where a child's imagination is directed primarily towards the character themselves, rather than the weapons they carry.

questions, questions

What is meant by 'aim'? Is this an intention and if so how strong is it? 'Balanced' sounds good but what does it mean, what is being balanced? An equal number of red and green toys, or big toys and small toys?

Did anyone think the Co-op sold weapons? What is meant by 'instruments of violence'? 'Define' has an air of precision about it but sits uncomfortably with 'and the like'. In any case, how is the debate about violent toys advanced by defining, for example, a kitchen knife as an instrument of violence?

What does 'however' tell us in this sentence? Note the change from aspirational 'aim' earlier in the text to the positive 'provide'. And so Action Man 'promotes learning'?How do we know that a child's imagination is engaged by Action Man, let alone 'primarily' directed to the character 'rather' that the weapon?

supplementary information

leaflet from the Co op (0800 317827) or downloadable from our web site.

Suitable for KS 2 English: engages with challenging subject matter; develops inference and deduction; encourages looking for meaning beyond the literal; requires pupils to qualify or justify what they think after listening to others and encourages them to deal co-operatively with opposing points of view.

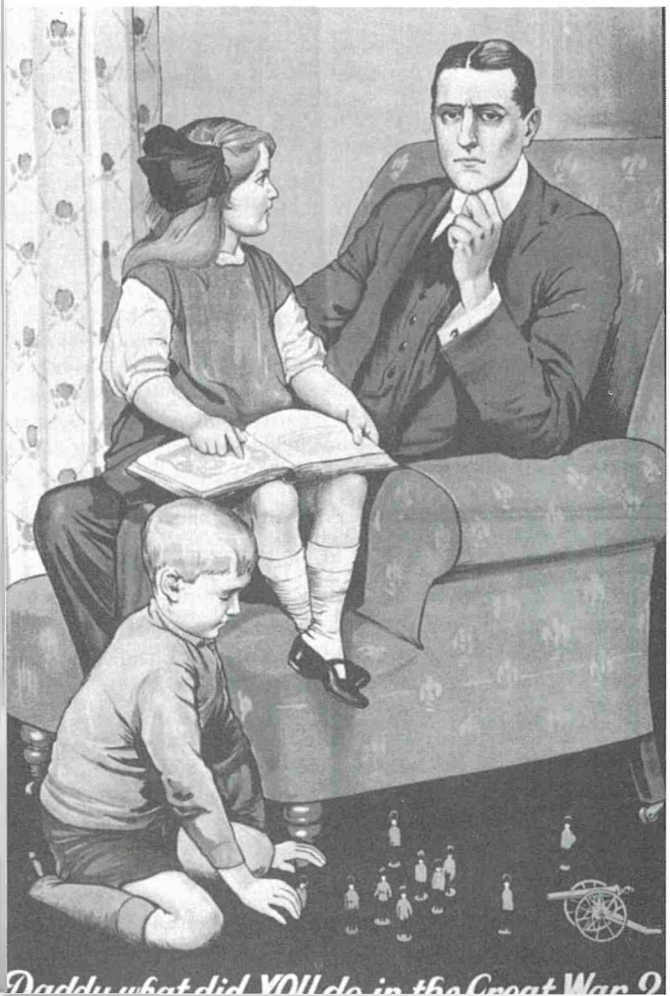
marketing war yesterday and today

In the twentieth century, advertising moved nearer to the centre of the nation's economy. New ways of appealing to and persuading people, many of them based on American techniques, were adopted. An American 'instinct' psychologist gave this piece of advice to advertisers:

> *an advertisement should be presented in such a way that a reader would associate it with his own experience, which was best done by appealing to his ruling interests and motives. These included the desire to be healthy, to hoard, to possess, to wear smart clothes, to get something for nothing, to be more like the privileged and successful classes.*

Psychological methods were used to great effect during the First World War. Young men were persuaded to join up to replace those already dead and wounded; both fighters and civilians were persuaded to maintain 'enthusiasm' for the war, which was proving disastrous.

One famous First World War poster employing psychological techniques is shown below. The family group is closely observed. The little girl, pointing to her history book, sits on her father's knee. Her brother plays with toy soldiers (so HE would be 'enthusiastic', then) on the carpet at their feet. The little girl's question has evoked guilt in the man, as his face shows. His daughter's expression suggests that she's already heard his shameful answer. Even the boy looks as though he can't trust himself to look up. The poster plays on basic human relationships, expectations and anxieties. By indicating what a man had to do NOW to avoid disappointing his family, it suggested how this sad scene could, after all, be averted: 'Join up NOW!' There's no room for the thought that Daddy's armchair might have been empty for good.



Post-war advertisers learned from propaganda posters like this one. They joined forces with management and, using their understanding of social psychology, created a new generation of consumers to keep the wheels of industry turning. Advertisements were designed to make people feel dissatisfied with themselves – the advertised product was offered as a remedy – or insecure.

Activity

Either a single session or a longer project.
Aim: to develop media literacy and to examine how values unacceptable in one part of life are actively encouraged in another.

- Copy the poster shown here, or if possible get hold of a reproduction of the original.
- Explain the poster's historical context so that the children clearly understand that it's part of a recruitment campaign.
- Ask the children to describe in detail what they see depicted.
- Discussion questions:

Who is the poster aimed at?
What does it want them to do?
How does it make them feel they ought to do it?
Why do you think persuasion was necessary?
Do you think advertisements should be allowed to persuade people to do things that might not be good for them?

- Additional questions:

Why is the history book in the picture important?
Why is the toy cannon important?

▶ Writing and drama activities:
Write stories or make plays about the characters shown in the poster, including this scene. Then decide what the father says and what happens after that.
Write stories or make plays about a man who sees the poster and goes home to his family to talk about it.
▶ Think about this:
The poster is set in the future, as it was then. How is that a clever thing to do?
The government paid to have this poster made and put up everywhere. In a way it was a sort of trick. Do you think governments should do things like that?
You've often been told that it's wrong to hurt people. Have you ever been told, or heard people say, that sometimes it's right? Can it really be both wrong and right? What problems could that make?
▶ If you can get hold of images of other recruitment posters from the First World War, ask the children to discuss them in the same way as above.
▶ Using the photograph shown here, of children at a summer camp, as a basis, discuss how even straightforward images like this can be a kind of advertisement.

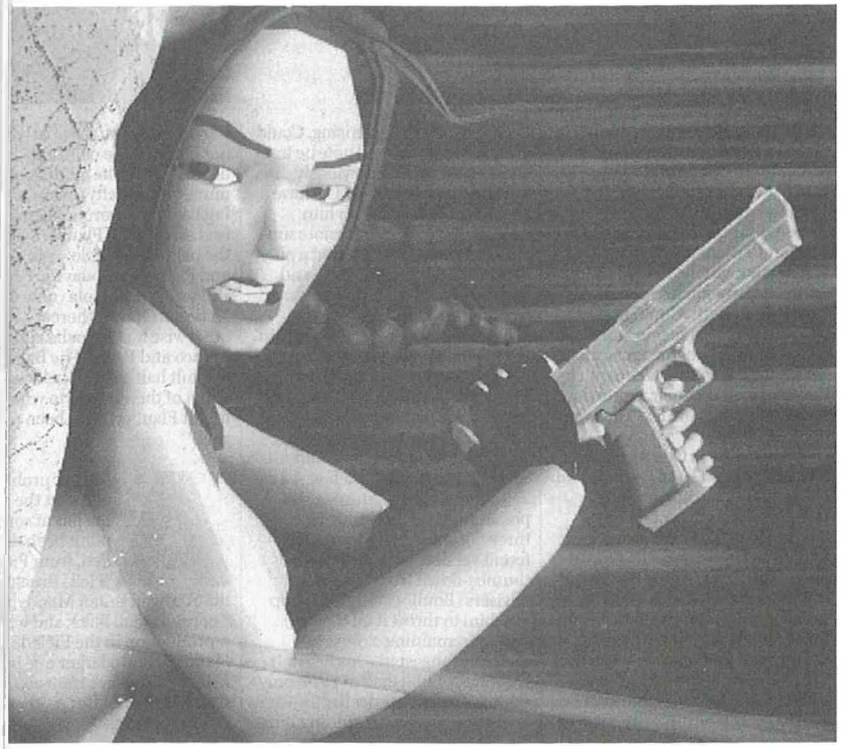
Notes

THE POSTER The poster was aimed at young male civilians, who may or may not yet have wives and children. The troops fighting in Europe were now short of men. Volunteers were being called for at this stage; later there was conscription. 'Daddy' in the picture would actually have been called up before the War ended; or he might have chosen to be a conscientious objector. The poster depended on, and reinforced, several assumptions: that it was a man's duty to fight or otherwise take part in war for his country; that soldiering was brave and could make you famous and admired; that not taking part in war was cowardly. The use of children in the poster – to be protected and not shamed – was an effective element. (Many wrongs have been committed in the name of children.) Children themselves may not like being used in this propagandist way.

THE PHOTOGRAPH Children and military make good copy and good photographs, so it's not surprising that the image was published. But for the armed services such photographs are serious. In this case, money was spent on sending seven men and a helicopter to a primary school camp for a day: not a recruitment drive, exactly, but certainly, as the army says, 'sowing seeds'. These children will think of the armed forces as an attractive, admirable and caring element of society, worth sustaining. The forces don't want them to grow up as anti-military campaigners.

THE QUESTION Many schools with tight budgets find this kind of support from the armed services hard to resist. But some teachers and parents are also uneasy about what amounts to political indoctrination – so why do they feel unable to do much about it?
Key Stage 2 framework for PSHE says pupils should have knowledge to 'become informed, active, responsible citizens'. They should begin to grasp that 'their own choices and behaviour can affect local, national or global issues and political and social institutions'. If it's right to teach this, it's right to act on it. You can say No to military intervention in your teaching.

Caption accompanying photograph in local newspaper
'Children at a primary school's summer camp got a chance to learn how the professionals do it...they learned that the choice available on the menu ranged from boil-in-the bag sausages and beans to beef stew and dumplings. They also learned about camouflage face painting. The RAF search and rescue helicopter took photographs which will be given to children to sell on for school funds.'



Not so much 'girl power' as adding sex to violence. But who cares? The Tomb Raider series has become an official millennium product.

going digital

In 1961, as Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space, the world's largest computer was installed at Britain's Atomic Research Establishment at Harwell, and engineers at America's Massachusetts Institute of Technology were asked to find some useful tasks for a new model computer to do.

Excited by the computer's ability to display information on a screen, the engineers thought they could think up something more interesting to do with it than de-bug programs. 'Space was very hot at the time,' remembers Steve Russell. 'Space is fun and most people don't appreciate how to manoeuvre things in space. So I wrote a program that had two spaceships moving against a background of stars.' After that it seemed only natural that they should shoot torpedoes at each other. Computer games became interlocked with war and a bleak future from the first moment of their birth.

Christened 'Space Wars', the novelty of this first game made it infectious, and its impact on the computer culture of the time is hard to overestimate. By the mid 1960s there was a copy on every research computer in America and virtually every young programmer played it. It no doubt cost the military- industrial complex millions of dollars in lost working hours; but it's certainly paying its way today. Fostering a belief in a bleak, uncertain and dangerous future can be nothing but good for the arms industry.

In this way, 'Space Wars' foreshadowed the virulent spread of 'Doom' thirty years later, and of the even more violent games of today.

military entertainment complex

Lockheed Martin, the world's biggest military contractor, along with the US Navy and Army simulation and training centres, operate in Orlando, in the shadow of Disneyland. The entire local economy is maintained by imagineers of one sort or another.

With the shrinking cost of technology and military programmes, the once prohibitively expensive simulation technology which Lockheed designed for the military has found its way into video games.

Now Lockheed adapts its military hardware and software to help Sega produce its new line of arcade games. By shrinking its room-sized military simulators down to a commercially viable five-foot cube, the company has been able to diversify into the commercial arcade market. Lockheed plans to use its new-found scaling expertise to place a new generation of military simulations inside actual fighter planes and tanks. 'As we downsize the technology to support entertainment applications', explains Lockheed's Carlton Cadwell, 'we're learning...and we're getting better. And the beauty of it is that we can spin that technology back up and sell it right back to the government at a lower cost'. You can now have cheap simulation built into tanks so that soldiers can practise out in the field – make-believe battles in real tanks. All this is now economically feasible because Lockheed Martin has had so much practice making small, cheap simulation products for Sega's commercial entertainment market.

When rivals Nintendo and Sega needed something to spice up their multibillion dollar competition for the console cartridge market, the Gulf War came to the rescue. It was the greatest thing to happen to the interactive entertainment industry since Sonic the Hedgehog. Battle simulation games rolled off the production line in millions. Former US President Ronald Reagan, who argued that today's joystick jockeys would be tomorrow's high-tech soldiers, would have loved it. The Discovery Channel thought it a good idea: they showed people playing sequences from 'Mortal Kombat', accompanied by an approving voice-over: 'These are the warriors of tomorrow....Their ease with computers makes them ideally qualified to fight the wars of the future.'

locating the enemy

The word 'enemy' is deceptively simple. It carries with it many assumptions, often unconscious, which we accumulate from childhood; and which can influence our understanding of key issues, and our thinking about them, for the rest of our lives.

The New Testament, for example, urges its readers to 'love your enemies' and turn the other cheek when physically threatened; but many seem to find this advice a contradiction in terms. The very word 'enemy' can inhibit tolerant, humane action, and certainly precludes any loving relationship with those to whom the word is applied.

At the end of the 19th century the colours of toy soldiers' uniforms clearly distinguished the 'good' guys from the 'bad'. As the 20th century grew older, identification of an actual enemy, at least in the industrialised western world, began to disappear. Memories of WW2 faded; ties with Germany and Japan became closer; even the Soviet Union's red star all but vanished from toys. Commercial considerations probably played a significant part in this despecification of 'the enemy'; but violence-condoning toys were much too profitable to abandon. New, all-purpose, hate figures were needed.

Inside the pictured 'lucky bag' (99p) a child can find a few sweets (120 ingredients, all listed), a giant spider, a phosphorescent bat, and an 'Action Man' colouring book (16 pages). The book's outline drawings have no narrative, but simply show Action Man doing violent deeds. None of them looks likely to be much use in performing the enclosed MISSION, which is to 'Use any equipment available to enable you to scale the great height, penetrate the fortress and destroy it – GOOD LUCK!'

Action Man has shed most of the military uniforms of his younger days, in favour of cooler gear. But his hardware, including missile-firing motorbikes, remains big, noisy and invariably destructive. His enemies are still unbelievably evil and shadowy. Not much scope here for imaginative, constructive play, and none for exercising skills in conflict resolution. You can't negotiate with unimaginable evil, for that very reason.

They were ready and waiting. Books and films had already populated outer space with monsters. When the 'race to the moon' (itself a component of the Cold War) made space even more interesting, manufacturers of toys quickly realised its potential. Aliens from other galaxies need no politically incorrect demonising. With some exceptions, such as cinema's heart-melting ET (subsequently to appear as a talented family pet in BT commercials), they are freely represented as 'bad', even deeply evil. What's more, space can be populated with a never-ending variety of collectable toy monsters who can be fought (or fight each other) using increasingly fantastic toy weapons. The immense violence-free wildernesses of the universe have been appropriated as an opportunity to promote violence-condoning behaviour and to nurture anti-human values.

For the earthbound 'the enemy' has put on the cloak of generic evil and goes by such 'professional' names as 'Dr X' – plain Mr or Ms X wouldn't cut it in the enemy department. Hate figures drawn from real-life conflicts have become unnecessary: the concept of 'enemy' already resides in our minds as a template along with prescribed courses of anti-enemy action (turning the other cheek not among them). And many of these hostile acts can be readily applied to real (though often imagined) foes in the real world.

If we want to establish a peaceful world we must realise that conflicts are not simply the work of malevolent people. In today's world we all affect each other for good or ill. Better therefore to nurture an understanding that destructive conflicts can be prevented from happening; and that if they do happen, they can be transformed, rather than crushed only to re-emerge even more destructively later on.

Old enemies are making a comeback in computer games under the heading of military history and education. No need for nationalistic antagonism here, violence is all that matters. You can choose to test your dogfight skills as an RAF, Luftwaffe or USAAF pilot. In Silent Hunter you can 'command a WW2 submarine', in Close Combat IV you can't put your battlefield tactics to the test by commanding authentically German or American troops'

'Teaching children to think rationally and critically actually makes a difference to people's susceptibility to false ideologies.

If you look at the people who sheltered Jews under the Nazis you find a number of things about them. One is that they tended to have a different kind of upbringing from the average person, they tended to be brought up in a non-authoritarian way, brought up to have sympathy with other people and to discuss things rather than just do what they are told.

I think that bringing up children in a certain way does help create a culture in which people are more likely to resist things. You can never be sure what will happen to any country in 20 years' time. 20 years ago many people went for their holidays to Yugoslavia.'

starting early: breaking the cycle of violence

It is now generally agreed (backed by overwhelming evidence provided by extensive research) that the relationship with parents and other significant adults is among the most powerful influences on a child's development and outlook. But all parents know that relationships with their children are neither simple nor one-sided; and other powerful influences abound.

A recent study of 9000 teenagers showed clearly that, by the age of twelve, children showed noticeable different levels of aggression according to their upbringing. 'The perception of parents' attitude towards fighting was the strongest predictor of aggression,' said Professor Pamela Orpinas. 'What parents tell their children about fighting tells a lot about the degree to which their children get involved in fighting.'

Pamela Orpinas maintains that 'children should be taught how to resolve conflict through peaceful means. It's not quite "turn the other cheek", but it is about communication.... We are in an age where children's violence can escalate and we must make them aware that weapons are not acceptable – and that includes toy ones.'

Parents (and teachers) have the opportunity to give clear and explicit messages to their children that fighting is not acceptable and show them different, nonviolent ways to solve conflicts.

The degree to which children and parents get on with each other is an important factor. Crucial too is the extent to which parents keep an active – and supportively critical – eye on their children's activities. Other family relationships also impact on children's attitudes to violence.

There is another major challenge, outside home and school, from the commercially-driven output of violent images, toys and games. Preventing access to these is difficult. It's impractical without unacceptably constant vigilance; and it's inimical to a fair and open relationship between parent and child. For this reason, if for no other, we need to challenge two prevalent views: first, that gratuitous use of violence to promote products is an acceptable means, and, second, that violence-condoning toys and games are acceptable playthings.

Creating a nonviolent environment in the family and the school is vitally important. But it is just as important to work for a nonviolent neighbourhood, nation, world. Failing that, we could become prisoners in our own small protective compound, fearful of the world beyond it.

Checkpoints

- Work to develop a good relationship with your children. Research indicates that the poorer the relationship with the parent, the more aggressive the child.
- Take time to listen to, and share information with, your child.
- Respect your children. Give them space. Respect their privacy. Let them express their opinions.
- Guide what your children watch on television and limit their viewing time. Watch programmes with them and discuss them afterwards. Help them to understand the difference between real life and what is on the screen, and to become alert to the contradictory messages about violence.
- Because the portrayal of weapons and violence is widespread, especially on TV, make sure your children understand that guns really do kill and cause great unhappiness among victims' relatives and friends.
- Teach your child that shouting, verbal assaults and physical force are not the way to resolve conflicts. Show them how to use nonviolent alternatives instead, such as talking, using humour or walking away if necessary. (Walking away to defuse an aggressive situation is a courageous act.)
- Help your children to understand that some of their friends may have reasons to be angry and fearful. These friends may not be in an environment in which respect is shown, or they may have role models who are used to settling disputes violently. Try to help your children put themselves in other people's shoes, and, as they do so, trying their best to be patient, kind and understanding. Again, being patient and understanding, especially when other people are not, is a strong and positive action.

the seville statement on violence

This Statement is a message of hope. It says that peace is possible and that wars can be ended. It says that the suffering of war can be ended, the suffering of people who are injured and die and the suffering of children who are left without home or family. It says that instead of preparing for war we can use the money for things like teachers' books and schools and for doctors, medicines and hospitals.

We who wrote this Statement are scientists from countries North and South, East and West. The Statement has been endorsed and published by many organisations of scientists around the world including anthropologists, ethnologists (animal behaviour), physiologists, political scientists, psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists.

We have studied the problem of war and violence with today's scientific methods. Of course knowledge is never final and someday people will know better than we know today. But we have a responsibility to speak out on the basis of the latest information.

Some people say that violence and war cannot be ended because they are part of our natural biology. We say that is not true. People used to say that slavery and domination by race and sex were part of our biology. Some people even claimed they could prove these things scientifically. We now know they were wrong. Slavery has been ended and now the world is working to end domination by race and sex.

five propositions

1. It is scientifically incorrect when people say that war cannot be ended because animals make war and because people are like animals. First it is not true because animals do not make war. Second, it is not true because we are not just like animals. Unlike animals, we have human culture that we can change. A culture that has war in one century may change and live at peace with their neighbours in another century.

2. It is scientifically incorrect when people say that war cannot be ended because it is part of human nature. Arguments about human nature cannot prove anything because our human culture gives us the ability to shape and change our nature from one generation to another. It is true that the genes that are transmitted in egg and sperm from parents to children influence the way we act. But it is also true that we are influenced by the culture in which we grow up and that we can take responsibility for our own actions.

3. It is scientifically incorrect when people say that violence cannot be ended because people and animals who are violent are able to live better and have more children than others. Actually, the evidence shows that people and animals do best when they learn how to work well with each other.

4. It is scientifically incorrect when people say that we have to be violent because of our brain. The brain is part of our body like our legs and hands. They can all be used for co-operation just as well as they can be used for violence. Since the brain is the physical basis of our intelligence, it enables us to think of what we want to do and what we ought to do. And since the brain has a great capacity for learning, it is possible for us to invent new ways of doing things.

5. It is scientifically incorrect when people say that war is caused by 'instinct'. Most scientists do not use the term 'instinct' anymore because none of our behavicur is so determined that it cannot be changed by learning. Of course, we have emotions and motivations like fear, anger, sex, and hunger, but we are each responsible for the way we express them. In modern war, the decisions and actions of generals and soldiers are not usually emotional. Instead, they are doing their jobs the way they have been trained. When soldiers are trained for war and when people are trained to support a war, they are taught to hate and fear an enemy. The most important question is why they are trained and prepared that way in the first place by political leaders and the mass media.

conclusion

We conclude that we are not condemned to war and violence because of our biology. Instead, it is possible for us to end war and the suffering it causes. We cannot do it by working alone, but only by working together. However, it makes a big difference whether or not each one of us believes that we can do it. Otherwise, we may not even try. War was invented in ancient times, and in the same way we can invent peace in our time. It is up to each of us to do our part.

The Seville Statement on Violence is a scientific statement which says peace is possible because war is not a biological necessity. The Statement was written by an international team of specialists in 1986 for the United Nations sponsored International Year of Peace and its follow-up. The Statement was based on the latest scientific evidence and it has been endorsed by scientific and professional organisations around the world.

The Seville Statement says there is nothing in our biology which is an insurmountable obstacle to the abolition of war and other institutional violence. It says that war is a social invention and that peace can be invented to replace it. The Statement consists of an introduction, five propositions and a conclusion. Each of the five propositions challenges a particular misstatement that has been used to justify war and violence.

The Statement was adopted by UNESCO in 1989.

children in war

'Children have nearly the same wishes no matter where they come from. They want clean water to drink and enough food to eat. They do not want to be sick. They want space in which to learn, develop and play. They want to know their neighbours. Especially in cities, they want peace and safety from threats and violence. And they tell us that they want to collaborate with adults to make their world better. When children's interests are at the centre of a society's concerns, that society becomes humane. When forgotten, the society is thrown off balance.'
UNICEF statement

Emotional distress affects over ten million children caught up in wars all over the world. Some who witnessed killing and violence are consumed by guilt that they were powerless to help their relatives or friends. Expecting fairness from the world, they are bitter and angry when wrong-doing seems to go unpunished. Children's grief and bitterness can result in aggressive behaviour; they may try to cope with their confused emotions with thoughts of revenge. Others, especially those orphaned or maimed in war, may withdraw into a painful silence. Whatever violence has overturned their worlds and their lives, they won't lose its physical and mental scars.

▸ Britain 1940: 'I remember always being undergound, at school in a tunnel and sleeping in an Anderson shelter. I was scared most of the time, every day not knowing if I was going to die. I slept with a spanner by my pillow; I sleep with one hand above my head to this day.'

▸ Ukraine 1941: 'The policemen took the children by the legs and threw them alive into the ravine, where they were buried under layers of earth. But the earth was moving long after because wounded Jews were still moving there. One little girl was crying, "Mummy, why do they pour the sand into my eyes?"'

▸ Vietnam 1966: 'In hospital, the little boy, a napalm victim, with plaster on both his legs to the hips, sat motionless and silent. His eyes were enormous, dark, and hopelessly sad; no child should have such eyes.... Men do not see the real misery of war.'

▸ Iraqi Kurdistan 1988: 'Shaho was nine when the Iraqi airforce chemically bombed Halabja. He vividly remembers the planes overhead and the clouds of gas smelling of fruit. Within weeks he began to suffer back pains, and now cannot stand or walk.

■ Mother and child poisoned by chemical weapons at Halabja. Very little protest at this from the countries (including Britain) which supplied Iraq with the wherewithal to produce chemical weapons.

'States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.'
Article 39. Convention on the Rights of the Child

He has to be turned every half hour to avoid bedsores. His friend Nizar was unconscious for 2 days after the gassing, and has lost control of his muscles. 'I can't even go to the toilet on my own. I'm afraid of ending up in bed for ever,' he says, bursting into tears.'

▸ Rwanda 1994: 'Uwizeye was found alive among the 4,000 corpses at Mukarangwe church. Uwizeye doesn't speak and is always to be found sitting alone. She doesn't play with other children or move about the children's centre voluntarily and she hasn't formed attachments with the aid workers. She is troubled with diarrhoea and her body often shakes.'

▸ Cambodia 1996: 'A driver told us that he procured young girls, twelve, thirteen years of age, for Chinese businessmen, who believe that sleeping with a young virgin increases their strength. The mothers come in from the poverty-stricken and war-battered countryside and offer the children for sale. What happens to children? "Oh, they become bar-girls," the driver said. The bars are in fact brothels.'

▸ Liberia 1996: 'Most of Liberia's thousands of child soldiers have experienced more loss and pain before the age of eight than the rest of us do in a lifetime. Many watched their parents killed in front of them, or were forced to kill their loved ones as a perverse initiation rite. I asked one nine-year-old where his parents were. "She dead. He dead. Everybody dead." "How old are you?" "Old enough to kill a man," the child said.'

▸ Kosovo 1998: 'They beat up the boys and took away a 15-year-old girl. Released an hour later, there was no hiding her ordeal. She was scratched and weeping and her hair had been slashed off with a knife.'

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For some of us the range of decision is very small; for the prisoner in jail who has not served his term tomorrow will be very much like today-there is not much choice. For all of us, however, there is some choice and we cannot escape a moral responsibility to choose.... Every decision that any human being makes, changes, however infinitesimally, the probability of catastrophe . . . or betterment.'

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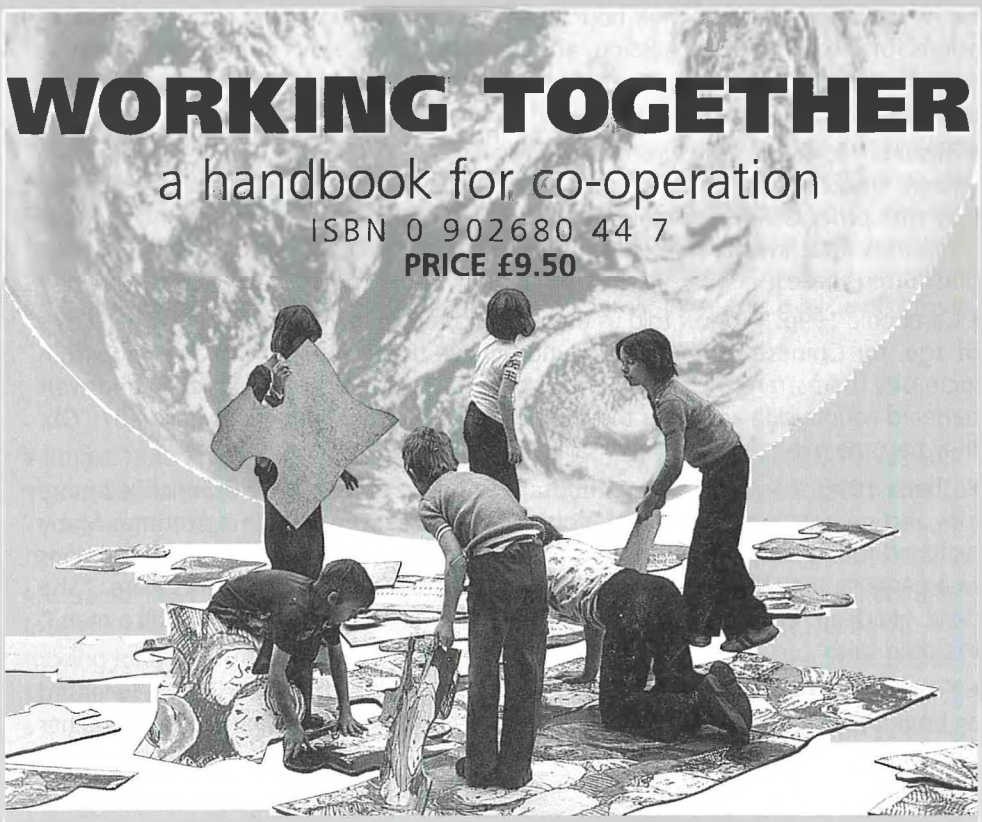

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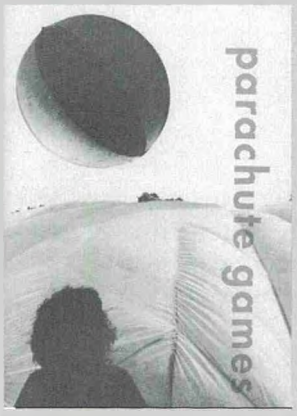

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child soldiers

The participation of children in war is not new, and until recently their participation has been largely in a subordinate role. In the past children were not effective as front-line fighters, since most of the lethal hardware was too heavy and cumbersome for them to manipulate. A child might have been able to wield a sword or a machete but was no match for a similarly armed adult.

However, a child with an assault rifle, a Soviet-made AK-47 or an American M-16, is a fearsome match for anyone. These weapons are very simple to use. The AK-47 can be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10. The rifles have also become much cheaper and more widely available – having few moving parts they are extremely durable and have steadily accumulated in war zones. Besides being able to use lethal weapons, children are also easier to intimidate; and they do as they are told. They are also less likely than adults to run away, and they don't demand salaries.

Children take part in wars for a variety of reasons. Often they are recruited; sometimes they are encouraged, or simply compelled. Sometimes they are driven by fear and desire for revenge, most often related to having witnessed violent acts of killing of family members; this experience motivated, for example, thousands of children to join the Ugandan National Resistance Army. 'The men who kill my mother, they make me angry. Me, I decided to go in the army. Me, I decide to beat them. If I finds them, I kill.' But they also often become involved because of the lack of other means to satisfy their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. 'Ironically', says a recent study, 'some young people perceive their own personal security to be greater inside armed

'It is not a universal truth that those to whom evil is done do evil in return, but it is true often enough.'

opposition movements than outside them with other orphans, street children, refugees and displaced civilians.'

Many of the thousands of children fighting with the Ugandan NRA had been driven from their homes and lost their families to rampaging government troops. They sought, or were picked up and adopted by, the NRA, where they found a 'home', stability, loyalty, discipline, empowerment and the prospect of promotion, respect and pride. 'And the commanders themselves', writes Peter Goodwin, 'for all their tough military exterior, were very paternalistic to "their boys", keeping a close eye on their well-being. The boy soldiers were not brutalised. They had been tutored for hours each day by their "political commissars" on the importance not of Marx or Mao but of discipline and honesty, and above all, respect for the rights of ordinary citizens.'

Not all child soldiers, however, are so unusually well looked after; in Liberia, for example, they received very harsh treatment. According to a social worker in Liberia, 'First of all, boys from both factions have told us that there were initiation procedures when they joined, in which they were forced to kill or rape someone or perform some atrocity, like throwing someone down a well, or into a river. This was supposed to demonstrate that they were brave enough to be soldiers. Anyway they were told that they would be shot if they didn't do it.'

War, for children as for adults, is a many-sided experience but its 'attraction' for the young should not be ignored. In many cases, war gives child participants a mission in life, order, and a sense of importance. Roger Rosenblatt, writing in 'Children of War', notes, for example, that Palestinian 'children of war' felt needed, both spiritually and practically, and they readily responded to the needs of others. Friendships were enhanced by the state of war and the institutions of an army provided stability for its members. 'Finally, a war allows boys to look like men. This seems a shallow benefit, but it is no small thing for a teenage boy to have something that yanks him out of his social floundering and places him, unlaughed at, in the company of heroes.'

Rosenblatt concludes that war cannot be valuable, for it replaces freedom of thought and opinion with a single ideology, and war's ultimate end is to create chaos and ruin, despite its superficial emphasis on order and discipline. War is a moral lie, he says, but a lie in which we all share.

Despite the few 'attractions' of participation in war, for the vast majority of children the experience is painful and dysfunctional and has far-reaching consequences, not only for them as they grow to adulthood but also for society around them.

Childhood is not so much defined by chronology as by culture and politics. 18 is widely seen as the age of transition to adulthood not only in terms of political rights but also, more widely, in law. Most countries have agreed to raise to 18 the age at which children can be recruited into the armed forces; but the British and US governments continue to object. At the time of writing, Britain remains the only country in Europe to send under-18 soldiers into combat – two 17-year-old soldiers were killed in the Gulf War (not by Iraqis but by US airmen!). Elsewhere in the world children as young as 7 or 8 are 'recruited' into national or rebel armed forces.

Chechen boys stand guard at a check-point in Grozny

The British Army 'wishes to recruit people in the early 16-year old bracket'. Why? Because they get 'a better response to training and a better return of service than from older recruits'.

Sokchie San's story

I was studying in grade five. During the communist regime, the army used to come to recruit children from our class. They didn't care about our age. The soldiers entered the school compound. I thought they were going to take the older students. I started running but they took me to a truck and carried me to the district office. When we were there they locked us in a room. We couldn't even go to the bathroom.

I was recruited in 1983. On the 6th of July 1989 I walked on a landmine. I was working in artillery, so I knew quite a bit about landmines.

My own feelings after so many years are mixed. When I was young I didn't know about morality as I know now. All that people told me made me violent. I grew up as a violent person. All the words I heard were rough. There was no space to think in a different way. I followed what my bosses said: if he said these were my enemies, they were true enemies. Some times they told us 'you are a strong and brave person, you have to do this', if you didn't do it, it meant you were not strong enough.

When a friend of mine fled from the military camp, I was asked to bring him back. I was able to see him but I felt sorry and didn't bring him back. When I arrived back to the camp, they shaved my hair and locked me in a cage for three days. The floor was wet. I cried and I wanted to die. I remembered my parents. I ate only once a day.

We had no option, we had to follow orders.

To governments and armed groups who recruit children I would say that children have no criteria. They can become very cruel as I was. The wound remains forever. I carry this wound in my body and this is very difficult for me.

I started to change when I had the landmine accident. When I started talking to the people in the villages I realised what my life was. Here in Banteay Prieb I saw that there were different things to what I had seen before. I could learn how to live in community, how to respect people and I learned a skill. I studied and in 1997 I became the assistant director of the wheel chairs workshop. Now I'm married and have three children. I don't want my children to grow up like I did. I want them to be like the people here, with education. I feel I am very lucky.

'All that people told me made me violent. I grew up as a violent person.'

Activity

Discussion/writing:

▸ 'I feel I am very lucky'. Sokchie San was 'strong enough' not to take his friend back to the Cambodian army camp. What other strengths do you think he has? Why, do you think, are his feelings 'mixed'?

▸ 'They didn't care about our age'. What did the soldiers care about when they were recruiting from the schools? What age do you think people should be recruited, if at all? Why do you think the soldiers used force to recruit Sokchie San and his friends?

▸ 'I walked on a landmine'. Landmines kill and disable people - often they are children who think the landmine is a toy. In war- zones round the world there are millions of unexploded mines, using up time and money (that can't be afforded or could be better spent) to find and defuse. None of this is good news: so why, do you think, are there so many landmines?

Action: A ban against the use of landmines is at last in force, after the campaigning efforts of people all round the world. Choose something else violent that is used in war, and begin to plan how you would start a campaign to have it banned. (Slogans, speeches; organisation of protest events; phones, post, e-mail, the Web; posters, badges, banners; getting support from famous people; songs and recordings; photographs, film...and your own new, brilliant ideas.) It looks as though people can make changes if they try hard enough. Why stop at banning landmines?

▸ Curriculum activity for **KS2** ***English, Information and Communication Technology, PSHE.***

This boy fought the Khmer Rouge from the age of 15 – until he stepped on a landmine.

postscript: the theories

THE DEVELOPMENTAL VIEW?

Through play, children construct an understanding of concepts and feelings: play is at the root of children's learning and development. Children play in their own unique ways to make sense of individual experience. A new experience causes them to modify their thinking and take it into account. In this way, the content of play evolves and changes as mastery and understanding progress. Children's development is best served when the origins and themes of play come from children themselves. When they're in control, they are choosing a content based on their individual needs and experience and on their current level of understanding. Some people therefore argue that because many children show a deep interest in war and violent play, it must be an important form of play through which they meet needs created by growing up.

A common view is that pretending to shoot or kill means quite different things to a child from what it means to an adult. Children don't fully understand time as a continuum, and they don't think about death as a permanent and irreversible condition. They can pretend to shoot an 'enemy' dead one moment, and then interact with the same 'enemy' the next. They can take on the role of the 'good guy' or the 'bad guy' and 'kill' people, without understanding the meaning or consequences of killing in the real world.

It's argued that by assuming the role of powerful fantasy characters, by expressing aggression in pretend situations, and by engaging in 'pretend fighting', children learn how to control their impulses as they struggle to stay within acceptable boundaries and receive feedback from their surroundings. When a child who's pretending to be a 'good guy' pushes another child and claims that he did it because he has 'super-powers', the responses of other children and adults help him to learn the difference between reality and pretence. In violent play children are also struggling to understand the things they hear about in the world around them. A child may see soldiers with guns on television and bring this image into play in an effort to understand it or make it less frightening.

War and violent play, it has been suggested, can be compelling and satisfying because it helps children to experience power and control at an age when many of life's experiences can lead to feelings of helplessness and lack of control. This is because war and superheroes embody simple black-and-white characteristics which neatly fit the way children view and interpret the world; because toys that promise power and strength, and are like those which children see performing dramatic feats on television, match children's own desire to feel strong. They provide concrete and salient images to which children's attention is often drawn. Finally, the primary male superhero figures which children see in the media make a clear distinction between male and female roles; in particular they provide boys with graphic information about male gender roles.

According to the developmental theory, war play may foster children's development through a complex and active process in which children use the content of play to come to grips with the world around them. However, when children's play is characterised by conventionality, lack of variety, meagre content and endless repetition, optimal development may be impeded. Children's needs are best met in play by the degree to which their activity is spontaneous rather than merely imitative, and by the degree to which assimilation rather than accommodation predominates. Today's children use television-based toys to imitate television images and behaviour, with little variation, elaboration, or evidence that they're making inner meanings of their own. It's increasingly clear that developmental needs are not being met through war play.

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL VIEW?

According to the sociopolitical view, children learn military-political values through war play. Concepts such as democracy and the rule of law have their origins, at least in part, in children's early experiences in the family and at school. Children's first understanding of the concept of world peace and international relations will be influenced by early experiences in resolving conflicts and establishing reciprocity with others, rather than from awareness of real conflicts among nations. Concepts about friends and enemies at a global level will grow out of such things as children's social experiences with peers, their exposure to similarities and differences among people, and how these are treated by adults around them. Thus, a child's early concept of 'enemy' – which is based in part on experiences of co-operation and conflict with other children – may come to include specific labels (e.g. 'Russians', 'Germans', 'refugees') as they are heard in adult conversation and in broadcasting.

War play has the potential for exerting an especially powerful influence on the political ideas children construct. Its very nature and content are permeated with issues of power and conflict, right and wrong, good and evil, friends and enemies; all of these are basic components of political concepts. As children learn understanding through play they bring new meanings into the outside world. Because fantasy and reality can be meshed in the young child's mind, the political concepts constructed in fantasy war play have the potential to influence how experience in the real world is interpreted. Much of the content of war play is influenced by social agents – the family, the school, mass media, and peer groups.

Toys can be seen as a reflection of society's dominant social and political values. In Sweden, for example, war toys are banned. Such a ban can be viewed as reflecting both a nonmilitaristic posture and the policymakers' efforts to socialise children into such a political philosophy. (If so, we might well ask what it means when, conversely, a society seems to be channelling its boys extensively into war play.)

As children spend more and more time watching it, television is becoming an increasingly important source for the content of their play. It is a source rich in political significance. Disagreements are often terminated by violence; dialogue often doesn't acknowledge the duality of human nature. The 'bad guys' are often foreign-sounding or faceless, and women have generally been portrayed in subservient roles. Much of this can teach children to behave in dehumanised, aggressive and war-like ways, and to value physical strength, power and violence. In addition, given the popularity, through heavy promotion, of ready-made toys associated with television programmes, the violent script of the programme is transferred imitatively into play. In such a situation children are less likely to develop meanings for themselves; less likely to construct their own cognitive categories for use as a basis for organising understanding; less likely to work out for themselves how and why things happen; less likely to decide for themselves what is real and what is not real; and less likely to feel that they're in full control of what goes on in their play.

When the quality of play is distorted in these ways, and children are exposed to increasing amounts of militarism and violence, then the concepts they form mirror what they have seen and are more likely to be militaristic. The aggressiveness that they exhibit may thus be more a reflection of what they are imitating than an indication of their own need to work out feelings or experience a sense of power. When this happens, the loss of connection between children's needs and their behaviour can lead to many of the changes adults have been reporting about current war play: more aggressive and hard-to-manage behaviour in class; more obsessive involvement in war play; and more militaristic behaviour not only in war play but out of it. Concepts learned in war play are often a mirror of outside influences.

'... we have the intriguing paradox of a tremendously successful industry that earns its income through the sale of advertising time, using claims that a company's influence, brand recognition and sale of products are enhanced through regular viewing – yet at the same time, industry representatives assert that heavy viewing by children of a variety of frightening anti-social behaviours on the same medium will not influence their behaviour!'

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