

LESSON
2

THE IMPACT OF
WAR ON CHILDREN



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OBJECTIVES

- 1 Explore the geography of conflict, the notion that conflict arises from a narrow set of causes and that many wars have common threads
- 2 Examine the wide impacts of conflict at different scales
- 3 Learn how these wide impacts have a disproportionate effect on children

Young people also get to work together in groups, use their critical thinking skills, think about ethical or philosophical questions, and build empathy with children affected by war by considering and researching the long-lasting effects on their lives.



RESOURCES



In the classroom

- ➔ *Optional* Large piece of paper with a large concentric ring drawn on it
- ➔ Sticky notes/small pieces of scrap paper and blu-tak
- ➔ *Optional* Enough tablets for one per group of four-six and links to short films on the War Child UK YouTube channel (see below for recommendations) [youtube.co.uk](https://www.youtube.co.uk) (search term War Child UK)
- ➔ *Optional* A selection of stories printed from the War Child UK website – [warchild.org.uk/impact/stories](https://www.warchild.org.uk/impact/stories)



On screen

- ➔ *Optional* A definition of (armed) conflict from the UN (see PowerPoint slide 1)
- ➔ *Optional* Image of target with key questions (see PowerPoint slide 2)



KEY TERMS AND QUESTIONS

What causes conflict and war?

UNITED NATIONS

HUMANITARIAN

What are the impacts of war for children, communities and countries?

TERRITORY DISPUTE

OPPRESION

DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

What humanitarian assistance might children need when they're affected by war and conflict? Why?

POLITICS

What are the most serious and long-lasting effects of war and conflict on children?

WAR CHILD UK

An independent humanitarian organisation

Humanitarian work can be dangerous, and the places where War Child operates – such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan – are risky environments. When a conflict flares up children are among the most vulnerable people affected. They often don't understand how to keep themselves safe in the same way adults do, and are particularly at risk if separated from their families.



Child Protection is integral to what we do, just like it is in UK schools. We work to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children.

We provide Child Protection by, for example, creating what is called 'safe spaces' where children can play, learn, receive counselling and regain some sense of normality and childhood. We offer schooling to children who have fled their homes, or whose schools have been destroyed or closed during war and we set up child helplines to respond as quickly as we can to their concerns.



War Child is a charity that exists to protect children living in conflict zones. Our job is to prevent and respond to the physical and emotional harm children face during war. It's also to help children to recover when they do suffer severe consequences, such as being traumatised by what they have seen or experienced.

To be effective at addressing grave violations to children's rights, we take a neutral approach to conflicts and help children on all 'sides'. This means remaining independent, non-political and talking to all sides of a conflict – our focus isn't on apportioning blame for a war, but on supporting the children caught up in it.





ACTIVITIES



10 – 15
minutes

Starter game

Recap on the work learners have done to define 'conflict' or ask learners to share their own definitions.

Use the United Nations (UN) definition and explain that it is the most accepted around the world because the UN is an international body that all the majority of countries are part of.

Then using the concentric ring on the board or a printed/drawn version, learners write a one-two word answer to the following questions (going out from the centre):

What causes conflict at home?

What causes conflict at school?

What causes conflict in our village/town/city?

What causes conflict across the world?

Are any of the answers the same? What else changes as the scale of a conflict changes? Does conflict at varied scales have different potential for escalating?

While the existing answers will be wide ranging and very different, it is possible to get learners to categorise most of them as a class, by moving the sticky notes under the following headings:

- ➔ Land or territory disputes
- ➔ Politics
- ➔ Religious/cultural differences
- ➔ Unequal distribution and use of resources
- ➔ Oppression

Is there a pattern? Are most of the examples from learners under one or two common headings (i.e. are there certain key causes)?

Can young people think of a war or conflict going on today that is caused by one or more of the categories?

What do they think caused conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, DRC, Colombia, Israel/Palestine and others?

How about historical conflicts they might have studied? What were the causes then? Were they different to more modern conflicts?



25 – 30
minutes

Main activity

Split class into groups of four – six. Each group watches a short video from the War Child YouTube library on tablet, PC or screen.

! *Note* some of these videos contain dramatic stories that some learners may find challenging.



Suggestions from the War Child UK YouTube channel:

- ➔ 'Al Jazeera interview on CAR Crisis'
- ➔ 'Children of Syria: War Child Interview'
- ➔ 'People fleeing fighting between M23 Rebels and Govt Troops in Goma'
- ➔ 'Sunday's story'
- ➔ 'Francis' story'
- ➔ 'Juliet's story'
- ➔ 'War Child in Uganda'

Alternatively, each group uses a case study from the War Child UK website 'Stories' section which can be printed. There are lots of stories to choose from.

Young people watch/read through for meaning and facts, to prepare a one-minute presentation about:



The country and scale of the conflict – is it about an individual, a community or a country? Identify and communicate briefly what has happened in their example



What they think the **impacts** have been on the person/people affected – thinking about this in relation to whether it's a *young person, a community or a country*



What **humanitarian assistance** or other help was needed or received?

Each group then spends two minutes noting down the key impacts of war and conflict on young people, using their story to help. The class displays them together, then works to categorise the impacts of war and conflict on children and their families according to:

PHYSICAL

ECONOMIC

PSYCHOLOGICAL



5 – 10
minutes

Plenary

Finish by asking learners about the impacts of war:

- ➔ *Which are the most serious? Why?*
- ➔ *Which impacts are the most long-lasting?*
- ➔ *Which would be most important for young people, families, communities or countries?*
- ➔ *Encourage thinking about less tangible aspects of assistance (e.g. challenge the traditional focus on poverty, thirst and starvation)*
- ➔ *Introduce concepts like feeling/being safe, feeling/being protected from harm*
- ➔ *What kind of assistance could be provided in this case?*



Further resources

If there's time, you could share some different perspectives (which learners may challenge) on the causes and impacts of war in groups or as a class. For instance:

Film: *'What caused civil war in Syria?'* – Syria conflict explained on the ITN channel on YouTube

Written article: *'The Causes of Conflict'* – worksheet based on an academic article by the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre

BBC Ethics: War (website section to browse)
bbc.co.uk/ethics/war



Further learning

Learners look at the contents of the *'UN Convention on the Rights of the Child'* (UNCRC). You can download a one-page summary of the Convention from the *'Rights Respecting Schools'* website (Click on *'Children's Rights'*). Learners use the document to make a list or write a paragraph about how children's rights can be affected by war and conflict.

They could focus on just one right (e.g. the right to education, play, security) and write about the examples they have watched or read during the lesson, and how that particular right has been affected by war. Or they could look at which rights are most likely to be impacted if a war broke out.

Do different people have different perceptions of what war, conflict or peace mean to them? If so, why?



Further action

Young people think about what *they* could do to help children who are affected by conflict – they make a list of possible options, and choose one thing to do.

Students could think about what they can do to raise awareness about children who are affected by conflict, raise money or do something to persuade others e.g. policy makers or decision-makers, to change what they do. You could use some of the activities in *'Lesson 6: Participation'*, to support young people to reflect and discuss what impact they can have as citizens.

THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

There is no single cause of conflict. Each conflict is unique, has a number of causes and has arisen because of a range of factors:



Political and institutional factors



Socioeconomic factors



Resource factors



Environmental factors



Political and institutional factors might include weak state institutions, political exclusion, corruption, and identity politics. If governments can't manage the differences of opinion between particular groups peacefully, or make sure that people feel they can have their say, by voting or being listened to, this can cause conflict. If people perceive that those in power are corrupt, spending money on themselves or a select group of people because of who they are or where they live, rather than to make the whole of society better, this can also cause unrest.



Resource factors include things like greed, unfair access to resources like land, and unjust resource exploitation. Have you ever heard the phrase 'Blood Diamonds'? There's a link between high value commodities and illegal drugs, and conflict. A group that wants to control access to natural resources, without getting proper permission or paying taxes, might have to use violence to keep control of the land they need and exclude those who want to live, farm or work there. The money earned will probably go straight back into funding the conflict.



Socioeconomic factors include things like inequality, exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. If certain groups are treated differently, excluded from a government's decisions or from the benefits and protection the rest of society gets, then they will feel a sense of injustice based on who they are or what they believe. This can cause resentment to grow over time and lead to conflict. Poverty and conflict are often linked – the majority of wars happen in poorer countries, however this should not be assumed. Modern conflicts like Syria demonstrate this. It's hard to say whether poverty causes conflict, or whether conflict makes poverty even worse. Based on conflicts you know about, what do you think?



Environmental factors have to do with the unequal distribution of natural resources, such as water. Experts say that environmental factors are becoming more important in conflicts, especially those in poor countries, due to climate change. Soil degradation from over-farming or pollution, or desertification can cause resentment, hardship, and migration. A rising population in one area can make this worse; with the increased pressure on land or water they can get even scarcer. Environmental factors are rarely the only cause of conflict, but can combine with other factors to cause conflict.

THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Can you think of war going on today that has been caused by one or more of these factors?

Since the end of the Cold War, many experts have drawn attention to the rise of new forms of violent conflict. They argue that wars and conflict today differ in several ways. Firstly, they tend to be internal rather than between countries; so civil war is becoming much more important. Secondly, those who fight in wars are more likely to be rebels, gangs or guerrillas, rather than soldiers who are paid by the government. Thirdly, they're more likely to get the money they need for weapons and activities from abroad. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly for the children at risk of being affected by war, the *methods* are also different. Armed groups are now much more likely to use terror, and to deliberately target civilians and children, rather than fight in traditional 'battlefields'.

Try comparing a historical conflict you know about, for instance, the First World War, with one that's currently happening to see how the approaches/ methods of war have changed.

Whether the *causes* of war have changed is a different question. Wars are still fought for economic, political, ideological and geopolitical reasons. For instance, control over and access to resources is still important in many violent conflicts.

Many experts argue that even civil wars and conflicts can have a global dimension. For example, in the Great Lakes region, internal conflicts have produced regional civil wars. Some terrorist activities are global in their reach, with loosely linked groups fighting in lots of places at once and moving from country to country to fight.

Along with the rise in 'terrorism', there are new pressures caused by migration, urbanisation and 'youth bulges' (where a country's population is dominated by children and young people – this is the case in the majority of conflict affected places). Combined with poor job prospects, this seems to have resulted in a rise in urban violence.



Violence can take many forms and is not just about guns and other weapons. For instance, men, women, boys and girls all experience targeted sexual violence during peacetime and conflict. Rape and other forms of gender-based violence are used as instruments of war to control populations, but are also the result communities being torn apart by war. Children are statistically more likely to experience this kind of violence from a family or community member than from a stranger in an army uniform. Why do you think this method of war is used so widely and have you heard about it before? If not, why do you think that might be?

Adapted from an article from the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre entitled '*Chapter 1 – Understanding violent conflict*' For more visit gsdrc.org and click on 'topics' and 'conflict'