

LESSON

3

ISSUES IN CONFLICT:
CHILD SOLDIERS



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OBJECTIVES

- 1 Express opinions about a variety of issues affecting young people across the world, and listen to others' views
- 2 Explore how and why children become 'child soldiers', and how it affects their lives in different ways
- 3 Build empathy with young people who have not been able to experience childhood

Learners also get the opportunity to work together in different groups, to reflect on controversial issues and develop their own viewpoints, to make justified arguments and use maps and testimony to develop their knowledge of an issue affecting their peers in conflict.



RESOURCES



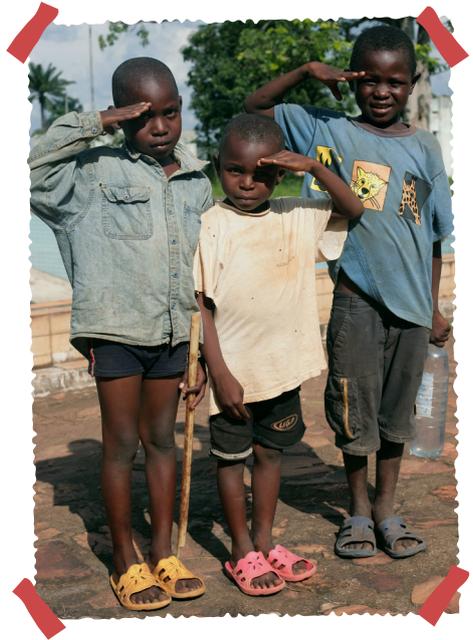
In the classroom

- ➔ Large pieces of paper with 'agree' and 'disagree' written on them
- ➔ *Optional* Section of War Child UK's website on child soldiers, printed for learners
- ➔ *Optional* 'Child Soldiers' Testimonies' worksheet, printed for learners



On screen

- ➔ Lesson 3 PowerPoint
- ➔ *Optional* Section of War Child UK's website on child soldiers – warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers
- ➔ Video: 'CNN report on child soldiers, featuring War Child beneficiary Juliet'. Find this on the War Child UK YouTube channel youtube.co.uk (then search term 'War Child UK')
- ➔ *Optional* 'Child Soldiers' Testimonies' worksheet



KEY TERMS AND QUESTIONS

What are human rights and do children and adults have the same rights?

RIGHTS

RECRUITMENT

How does conflict affect children's rights?

REBELS

How do children become child soldiers?

MILITIA

CHILD PROTECTION

What short and long-term effects does being a child soldier have on young people's lives?

SECURITY

How does War Child work to protect children's rights?

GOVERNMENT FORCES

ACTIVITIES



10 minutes

Starter game

Start by displaying pieces of paper with 'agree' and 'disagree' written on them at opposite ends of the classroom. Explain to learners that you will read some statements and they can stand near one of the words to express whether they agree or disagree with it, as depicted below.

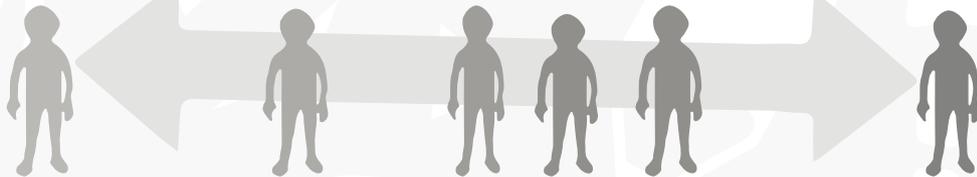
E.g. If they strongly agree, they could stand directly under the 'agree' sign and if they're not sure, they should stand somewhere in the middle between the two words. There is only one rule: everyone has the right to choose where to stand and what to say.

Start with some statements that relate to learners own lives that might provoke debate and discussion. Move on to focus on some statements around children's rights, and how children can be affected by conflict. Here are some suggestions but you could also add your own:

- School food is always healthy
- Premier League footballers deserve the wages they earn
- Education is a human right
- Children need the same rights as adults
- Children need more protection from the effects of war than adults
- Some children choose to fight in wars

AGREE

DISAGREE



Ask one or two learners why they decided to stand where they did. After they explain their reasons, other learners can move if they have been swayed or persuaded in any way by their peers (and in turn explain why they have moved).

This would be a good point to explain that the process of trying to persuade others to change their views and act on them is called **advocacy**.





30 – 40
minutes



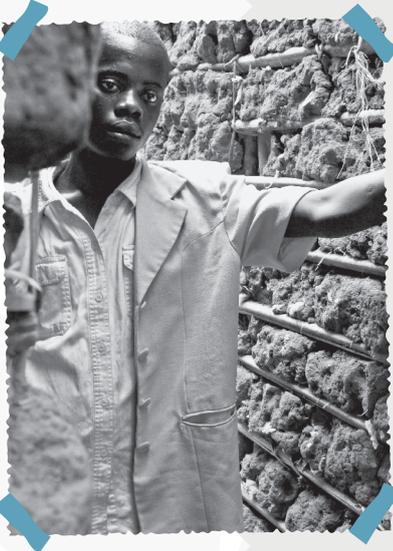
In Pairs

Main activity

Display the first two PowerPoint slides for lesson 3 and ask learners to work in pairs. What do they think of when they hear the term ‘child soldiers’? Learners spend 2 – 3 minutes writing down as many words or phrases as they can think of.

The questions can prompt their thoughts and discussions:

- ➔ Where in the world do child soldiers exist?
- ➔ What do child soldiers do?
- ➔ What rights do children miss out on when they become soldiers?
- ➔ Are they always forced to fight?
- ➔ What do you think the impact of being a child soldier could be on a young person?
- ➔ Who should protect children from becoming child soldiers?



What do we mean by ‘child soldiers’?

The term ‘child-soldiers’ conjures narrow images of children in army uniforms wielding AK-47’s – but in-fact, the problems linked to child-soldiering are widespread and broad in terms of both their impact and the involvement of children. A more appropriate term for this group of children is; ‘children associated with armed forces and armed groups’ (or ‘CAFAG’ for short).

A child soldier is any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.

Learners now join with another pair and find at least three words or phrases they have in common – taking those common terms and getting together with another group to again find common terms until the whole class has found at least one common word or term that is brought to mind when they think of ‘child soldiers’.

What do learners think of the term or words they came up with as a class? Does this common word represent the experiences of all child soldiers, e.g. both genders, the variety of things they might do, the experiences they have?

Before looking in more detail at the real stories of child soldiers, use the rest of the PowerPoint slides to give learners a quick quiz (either in pairs, groups or in two teams), to find out more about child soldiers.

Main activity (cont...)

Watch the first 5 minutes 30 seconds of 'CNN report on child soldiers, featuring War Child beneficiary Juliet' from the War Child UK YouTube channel. Ask learners to write down:

- Something that they found out
- Something that surprised them
- Something they felt they were already aware of

Then ask learners some questions about Juliet's story:

How did Juliet become a child soldier?

What was life like for her?

Which of her human rights did she lose while she was a 'child soldier'?

What were the key events in her story?

How might Juliet's experience have been different if she was a boy?

What would you ask Juliet if she visited your school?

How is Juliet's life similar or different to yours?



Finish by freezing the film at the world map which appears at around 5:19 minutes. Can learners point out any other countries around the world where children were fighting in recent wars? What do those countries have in common, if anything? Are they surprised by anything on the map? Do they think the map might look different if it was reproduced today? What would be different?

It's worth pointing out at this stage that although we might think of Africa when we think about child soldiers, this stereotype should be challenged. There are actually lots more countries around the world outside Africa where child soldiers have and are being used in conflicts, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Thailand.

Use the 'Child Recruitment: Testimonies' worksheet printed out or on screen to focus on the different experiences of children associated

with armed forces and armed groups, and the locations where children face this challenge. If there's time, you could get learners to read silently or together the section of War Child UK's website on child soldiers (click on 'issues we work on – Child Soldiers'), focusing on **where** child soldiers fight, **why** and **what** the impact might be on them. Show on screen or print out the relevant section.

Ask learners to consider the similarities and differences between the lives of young people in a war-torn country and young people in a peaceful country. You could record their responses in a Venn diagram on screen or on the board. Ask them: What sorts of help and support might child soldiers need in the short-term, and in the long-term? Who can protect children who are part of armed groups?



10 minutes

Plenary

Ask learners to consider the importance of the lasting impacts that Juliet's and other children's experiences may have had on them. They have all had to cope with change and develop resilience to come to terms with their experiences. Ask them:

- ➔ What impact do you think this experience has had, in the short and long term?
- ➔ How do you think Juliet has been able to move on after her experiences? (she is now an advocate for change and has spoken at international events with stars like Angelina Jolie)
- ➔ In her position, how would you have felt coming face-to-face with an abductor after the war?



Now that learners have found out more about the issue of child soldiers, why not ask them if they think the term 'child soldiers' reflects the experiences of the young people whose stories and words they've looked at during the lesson. Is there anything wrong with this term?



Further resources

Film: Emmanuel Jal, a musician, actor and former child soldier, tells his story on TED. Find the film on War Child UK's website warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers/child-soldiers-videos

Written article: If there wasn't time during the lesson, share the section of War Child UK's website on child soldiers (warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers) which gives an overview of where child soldiers fight, why and what the impact of fighting might be on them. Show on screen or print out the relevant section.

Feature Film: Use intofilm.org to show the film 'Africa United' through your school's film club. The film tells the story of three Rwandan children who decide to travel to Johannesburg to audition for the 2010 World Cup opening ceremony. On their way, they meet Foreman George, a soldier whose story is in part based on Emmanuel Jal's real life experiences of being a child soldier. The film stars Emmanuel Jal.



Further learning

Learners have explored how children across the world become child soldiers and what their experiences are, they could now reflect on this further by completing a creative writing task. Imagine they are a child soldier like Juliet, Hannah or the boy from Iraq, and have a rare chance to write a diary entry about their experiences. Alternatively, learners could look at what the opportunity to create a social media post or blog might give child soldiers. Would appealing for help and giving away their location or the names of their commanders bring further consequences? Will they risk everything to try and get help, or decide to document their experiences anonymously in the hope that those reading would be able to raise awareness in their communities?



Further action

Learners could work together to raise awareness of child soldiers in the school community and beyond, using some short films and music videos on the War Child UK YouTube channel made by other UK schools, as inspiration for their own awareness campaign youtube.co.uk (then search term War Child UK).

Kingsbury High School in London created their own version of War Child's single I Got Soul. It's called 'Kingsbury Angry Mob – Singing for children in war zones'. They also made the short film 'Kingsbury High – I Got Soul remix'.

Learners from Gaynes School in Essex helped to raise awareness about child soldiers and made a video of their campaign called 'A Child's War – Child soldiers campaign'. Use this video to look at the different ways the campaigners raised awareness of the issue, and examine which routes might be most effective.

Ben, a student at the Anglo European School in Essex wrote a song inspired by War Child's work, called 'Ben's song for War Child'.

Check out War Child's current campaigns, share your voice and get involved at warchild.org.uk/campaigns



CHILD RECRUITMENT

““””

TESTIMONIES

Hannah's story, Democratic Republic of Congo

Hannah – let's call her Hannah, but it's not her real name – lived in a small village with her parents in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The countryside has rainforests that are home to animals like gorillas, and elephants. It's beautiful, but remote: there aren't many roads or towns, and most people live in small isolated villages. There are enormous areas of forest where it's easy for people to disappear. That's just one of many reasons why lots of armed groups have made the forest their base.

One day, Hannah's life was turned upside down when her village was attacked by a military group called the FDLR. Along with several other girls, Hannah was abducted and taken back to the FDLR military base in the forest. She was given as a 'wife' to one of the soldiers. Her family lost all contact with her and had no idea where she was.

Hannah was held captive, followed everywhere by a guard with a gun. When the FDLR forces left their base to attack other villages, Hannah and the other 'wives' were guarded by junior soldiers so they wouldn't run away. But when the soldiers' base was attacked by the country's military forces (called the FARDC), she saw a chance to escape and in the confusion and fighting, managed to run away into the forest. By this time, Hannah had been living with the soldiers for over two years – and she was pregnant.

Hannah eventually reached a village and explained to the people she met what had happened to her. They helped her get back home, where she was reunited with her astonished parents. They were overjoyed! They had assumed Hannah was dead.

Hannah gave birth to a baby girl, but even though she was back home, she was still far from safe.

Because she had escaped from the military base, the FDLR were looking for her and would make trouble for her family and the village if they found her hiding. Living at home was putting her, her baby and the rest of her family and friends in danger.

Luckily, there was somewhere she could turn to. War Child UK helped Hannah and her baby move to the city, to live in a centre for other girls like her. Hannah enrolled in catering classes and learned how to cook things like bread and pizza, studied food hygiene and got work experience at a restaurant. Thanks to the centre, she could turn her life around.

'I want to set up my own catering stall, maybe in the market,' Hannah told War Child. Hannah, and young people like her, can get help including a small loan and some basic equipment to get their business started, to make sure there is a positive long-term impact, even when War Child is no longer there.

**Hannah's name has been changed to protect her identity.*

CHILD RECRUITMENT

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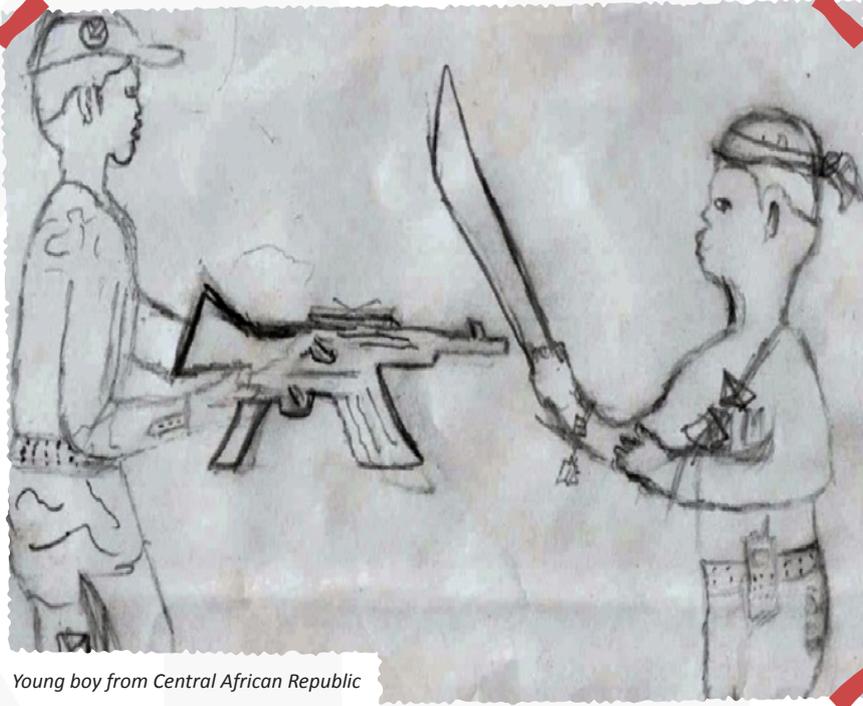
TESTIMONIES

Father of a 14-year-old boy living in Iraq

‘I was in my shop with my son, when members of an armed group came and asked for money. I gave them all I had. They said it wasn’t enough and so my son had to join them in their fight. They took my son away, and I haven’t seen him for three months. I don’t know what’s happened to him but I have seen the armed group giving guns to children and ordering them to fight. I do not know what to do.’

A 5-year-old boy from Syria who is living as a refugee in Jordan

‘I want a gun so I can fight’



Young boy from Central African Republic

This picture was drawn by a child from the Central African Republic living as a refugee in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It shows how children were recruited into armed groups during the peak of conflict in the Central African Republic. Children in War Child projects often use drawing to help express themselves when they have experienced trauma, this is part of the healing and recovery process.