

Child soldiers

Time required

About 70 minutes

About the lesson

An introduction to the issue of child soldiers in Uganda.

Resources

- Quiz (supplied)
- Uganda fact sheet (supplied)
- Role-play cards (supplied) – enough copies for each group of four pupils
- Photo from Gulu (supplied)

Learning objectives

- To learn some basic facts about Uganda.
- To learn about child soldiers in Uganda.
- To understand what it is like to be a child soldier.
- To think about what can be done to stop children becoming child soldiers.

Links to National Curriculum subjects

- Geography
- Citizenship
- English
- Art

Sources:

www.soschildren.org
www.bbc.co.uk/news
www.avert.org
www.fas.org

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Lesson plan - Key Stage 4 and above

Introduction to Uganda

Introduce Uganda by reading out the **Quiz clues**, one by one, and asking children to guess which country they think it is. Or you could give out a copy of the quiz clues (with the Uganda heading cut off), one by one, and pupils take part on their own or in small groups: the person/group that manages to guess the country with the least clues wins. Alternatively, pupils could quietly write down a guess for each clue and then you could collect them in before revealing the correct answer. 10 mins

Answer: Uganda.

Introduction to child soldiers

Show or read out the following definition, and asks the pupils what a person described like this would be called: 'A person under the age of 18, who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or irregular armed forces. This person performs a range of tasks from laying mines to participating in combat and performing domestic tasks. This person has been directly or indirectly forced to do this'. 10 mins

Answer: a child soldier.

Explain that the use of child soldiers is common in Uganda, and that this is because of the armed conflict in the north of the country. Make sure that pupils know about The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) before doing the role-play activity below. See **Uganda fact sheet** supplied.

Group activity

Encourage pupils in groups of about four to come up with at least five reasons why children might become child soldiers. Some possible answers: 10 mins

- They are forced to join by the threat of violence.
- They do it because they want revenge; perhaps a rivaling armed group has hurt/killed somebody close to them?
- For financial reasons; many armed groups pay a small salary, or offer food and accommodation.
- To avoid forced marriage. This is a common reason for girls who become child soldiers.
- To feed an alcohol/drug addiction. Armed groups sometimes deliberately make sure their child soldiers become addicts, and they are then the only ones who can help them feed their addiction

Role-play activity

Explain to pupils that they will now do a **Role-play activity** which will make them think about what the life of a child soldier might be like. Divide pupils into groups of four, and hand each group a set of **Role-play cards** which they place face down in front of them. (You need to mark the backs of each card with the card number given in the top left corner beforehand). A nominated 'reader' then starts by reading the information on the card, and the group makes a mutual decision on what card to take next. When they have finished, they can have a look at what would have happened had they chosen another card. End the activity with asking for pupils feedback. Do they think the story told is realistic? Why/why not? Explain that it is based on several true stories told by children cared for by SOS Children's Villages in Gulu, Uganda. 20 mins

Child soldiers (cont.)

Discussion

Encourage pupils to suggest what can be done to stop the use of child soldiers, both in the countries where the practice is common and here in the UK. Some possible answers:

10 mins

Abroad:

- Disarm, either by collecting weapons or by offering amnesty for people/ children who voluntarily hand in weapons.
- Demobilize (officially discharge child soldiers). In some countries, governments do this by paying irregular armed forces to discharge the child soldiers. Ask what pupils think about this. What do they think the leaders of the armed forces might buy with the money?
- Reintegrate (this means re-integrating former child soldiers into society by finding them a place to live, education etc). Explain that this is very difficult because the former child soldiers often meet hostility from others in the community.

Here:

- Raise awareness; ask pupils to think of ways to do this.
- Boycott; by avoiding buying products made in countries where child soldiers are used, consumers can put financial pressure on governments to take the problem seriously.
- Fundraise; there are many reintegration programmes going on across the world, and through supporting these financially more child soldiers can be helped to lead a normal life.

Introduction to SOS Children's Villages

Show the **Photo from Gulu**. Explain to pupils that this is from the SOS Social Centre in Gulu, Northern Uganda. The Social Centre started as an emergency relief centre supporting the many refugee children in the area, as well as the former child soldiers. Today, SOS Children has a permanent presence in Gulu, and the temporary children's village there will soon be replaced by a permanent one. SOS Children also offers counselling and music therapy sessions to the children. On the photo, there is a long line of people waiting in a queue. In the foreground there are some branches. There is also a man standing to the left of the branches. Explain to that what is going on in the photo is a reconciliation ceremony. The people waiting in the queue are former child soldiers, and they are waiting to step over the branches and receive the official forgiveness of their community. When they have gone through the ceremony they are officially forgiven for their crimes, and welcomed back into their communities.

10 mins

Extension ideas

- Pupils find out more about Uganda and create an information sheet or poster.
- Pupils write about what it must feel like to be a child soldier in Uganda.
- Pupils research the rights of the child, and look at which rights are violated through the use of child soldiers.