



Child soldiers and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Developed by: Arthur Scott Parker

Subject: Social Studies

Grade level: Grades 9, 10 and 11

Brief overview:

Students will examine the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in the context of the tragedy of child soldiers. Using the testimonials of child soldiers and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, they will write letters to the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs asking what the Canadian government is doing to protect children who become child soldiers.

CIDA development theme(s):

- basic human needs
 - child protection
- human rights, democracy, and good governance
 - respect for human rights
 - peace building and conflict resolution
 - civil society and the security of the individual
- gender equality

BC Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes:

It is expected that students will:

- identify and clarify a problem, an issue, or an inquiry (Social Studies 9, Applications)
- select and summarize information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources (Social Studies 9, Applications)
- plan, revise, and deliver formal oral and written presentations (Social Studies 9, Applications)
- co-operatively plan, implement, and assess a course of action that addresses the problem, issue, or inquiry initially identified (Social Studies 9, Applications)
- demonstrate leadership by planning, implementing, and assessing a variety of strategies to address the problem, issue, or inquiry initially identified (Social Studies 10,)
- apply critical thinking—including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, and defending a position—to make reasoned judgments about a range of issues, situations, and topics (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes)

- demonstrate effective research skills, including (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes)
 - accessing information (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - assessing information (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - collecting data (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - evaluating data (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - organizing information (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - presenting information (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
 - citing sources (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes of Social Studies)
- demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes)
- demonstrate skills and attitudes of active citizenship, including ethical behaviour, open-mindedness, respect for diversity, and collaboration (Social Studies 11, Skills and Processes)
- explain how Canadians can effect change at the federal level (Social Studies 11, Politics and Government)
- assess Canada's participation in world affairs with reference to human rights, United Nations, modern conflicts (Social Studies 11, Autonomy and International Involvement).

Time required: three or four classes

List of required materials and/or equipment:

- summary of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, student friendly version: www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what_rights_flyer_english.pdf (one copy for each student)
- seven testimonials from former child soldiers (see appendix two; one copy for each student pair)
- data retrieval sheet (see appendix three; one copy for each student pair)
- background information for teacher/student Global Report on Child Soldiers www.child-soldiers.org/library/global-reports

Procedure:

1. Give each student a copy of the summary of the [*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*](http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what_rights_flyer_english.pdf) and have the students circle articles 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 18, 19, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39.
2. Hand out the seven testimonials and have the students read aloud and discuss each of them. Identify specific violations of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in one or two examples.
3. Independent Research: For homework (or you may wish to take an additional class in the computer lab or library), ask students to link onto websites describing the experiences of child soldiers. They are to:
 - find at least two examples of child soldiers
 - write a summary of each case, being sure to cite the information sources

- identify the articles in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* that are being violated in each case (some articles may not have already been identified and circled).
- bring their work to class to be used in a small group activity next day

Suggested web sites:

- www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/voices.htm#N_4_
- hrw.org/campaigns/crp/voices.html
- www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights/childrenofconflict
- www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/voices-of-young-soldiers
- www.invisiblechildren.com/home.php
- www.warchild.ca/

4. Assign students to [heterogeneous, co-operative learning](#) groups of three or four students. Each group is to select a [facilitator, recorder and reporter](#). The group task is to:
 - have each group member is to report on the specific cases that they have discovered in their independent investigation online (homework). In each case the source of the information should be identified.
 - discuss the following questions with regard to child soldiers:
 - What kinds of conflicts are child soldiers involved in and where are these conflicts happening? Give specific examples.
 - Why are child soldiers forced into this role? Who benefits?
 - What is the impact on families, communities and countries of child soldiers?
 - What have other students around the world done to bring this practice to an end?
 - Are there any recent cases of Canadian children becoming child soldiers? If so, how is the Canadian government helping them?
 - What should be Canada's role in addressing this problem?
5. Reporters from student groups report out to the class as a whole. Teachers should debrief the reports and promote a class discussion around these issues. Attention should be paid to the new stories of child soldiers discovered by students in their online investigation and the specific articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* that are being violated.
6. Organize the class into pairs. Hand out a copy of the data retrieval sheet (appendix 3) to each student pair. Ask students to refer to their copies of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* as they co-operatively complete the data retrieval sheet.
7. Using the information gathered, students are to write a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs describing the experiences of at least five child soldiers and quoting the specific articles from the UN Convention on the rights of the Child that are being violated

Assessment strategies

- Using the BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility for Grades 8–10, www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf-stands/s8to10.pdf, the teacher will see, through oral discussions and letter writing, the development of the child.
- By grading the data retrieval sheet and the letter to the Minister, the teacher will evaluate the ability of the student to synthesize information, and meet the prescribed learning outcomes listed above.

Suggestions to extend the lesson:

Students should visit www.invisiblechildren.com/home.php or www.warchild.ca, they have a series of creative student campaigns to help end the tragedy of child soldiers.

Appendices of lesson resources:

Appendix 1: Sample letter

Appendix 2: Child soldiers' stories, www.un.org/works/goingon/soldiers/stories.doc

Appendix 3: Child soldiers and human rights—data retrieval sheet

Sample letter (fictitious character)

Jane Doe
123 Anystreet
Burnaby, B. C.
Canada
V5I X32

(Today's date)

Foreign Affairs Canada
125 Sussex Canada
Ottawa ON.
Canada
KIA OG2

Dear Minister of Foreign Affairs,

I am a grade eleven student at Riverside Secondary studying the tragedy of child soldiers. I am concerned that the government of Canada should be addressing this problem.

Obama Ninge is a thirteen year old boy from Somalia who was arrested for no apparent reason, taken from his parents, tortured and forced to fight in the armed militia. This is a clear human rights violation of Article 11 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which states, "You have the right to be protected from kidnapping." The use of torture, furthermore, is certainly a violation of Article 19, which states, "You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated..."

Could you please tell me what the Canadian government is doing to assist these children?

Yours truly,

Jane Doe
(student)

Child soldiers' stories

1. When Ishamael Beah was 14, he was recruited into the Sierra Leone Army. He remained a soldier for almost three years. In his testimony, read today by Samekelo Mokhine, he described his first experience at the front line. He is now studying in the U.S.

“When we got there we were in an ambush, the rebels were attacking where we were in a bush. I did not shoot my gun at first, but when you looked around and saw your schoolmates, some younger than you, crying while they were dying with their blood spilling all over you, there was no option but to start pulling the trigger. I lost my parents during the war, they told us to join the army to avenge our parents.”

Source: Franz Kruger, “Child Soldiers Active in 41 Countries,” *Radio Netherlands*, June 12, 2001.

2. In Uganda, children are caught in the battle between Uganda’s People’s Defense Force (UPDF) and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebel force, which is committed to overthrowing the Ugandan government and to this end rounds up children from villages it raids and forces them to join with them. One 16-year-old girl testified to the cruelties she endured when a boy tried to escape:

“One boy tried to escape, but he was caught. They made him eat a mouthful of red pepper, and five people were beating him. His hands were tied, and then they made us, the other new captives, kill him with a stick. I felt sick. I knew this boy from before. We were from the same village. I refused to kill him, and they told me they would shoot me. They pointed a gun at me, so I had to do it. The boy was asking me, “Why are you doing this?” I said I had no choice. After we killed him, they made us smear blood on our arms. I felt dizzy. They said we had to do this so we would not fear death, and so we would not try to escape.”

-Susan, 16

Source: Human Rights Watch, *The scars of death: Children abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda*. USA, Human Rights Watch Report, 1997.
www.hrw.org/reports97/uganda/

3. “The first time I went into battle I was afraid. But after two or three days they forced us to start using cocaine, and then I lost my fear. When I was taking drugs, I never felt bad on the front. Human blood was the first thing I would have every morning. It was my coffee in the morning... every morning.”

-Ibrahim, 16

Source: Youth Ambassadors for Peace, *Voices and stories*, Free the Children, 2001.

4. “I was in the front lines the whole time I was with the [opposition force]. I used to be assigned to plant mines in the areas the enemy passed through. They used us for reconnaissance and other things like that because if you’re a child the enemy doesn’t notice you as much; nor do the villagers.”

-Former child soldier from Burma/ Myanmar

Source: Interview by Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Children: the invisible soldiers*. Stockholm: Radda Baren, 1997. hrw.org/campaigns/crp/voices.htm

5. “They beat all the people there, old and young, they killed them all, nearly 10 people...like dogs they killed them...I didn’t kill anyone, but I saw them killing...the children who were with them killed too...with weapons... they made us drink the blood of people, we took the blood from the dead into the bowl and they made us drink...then when they killed the people they made us eat their liver, their heart, which they took out and sliced and fried...And they made us little ones eat.”

-Peruvian woman, recruited by the Shining Path at age 11

Source: Peruvian woman, Centre for Defense Information, “The invisible soldiers: Child combatants,” *The Defense Monitor*, July 1997. hrw.org/campaigns/crp/voices.htm

6. “I was recruited by force, against my will. One evening while we were watching a video shown in my village three army sergeants came. They checked whether we had identification cards and asked if we wanted to join the army. We explained that we were under age and hadn’t got identification cards. But one of my friends said he wanted to join. I said no and came back home that evening but an army recruitment unit arrived the next morning at my village and demanded two new recruits. Those who could not pay 3000 kyats had to join the army, they said. I (my parents) could not pay, so altogether 19 of us were recruited in that way and sent to Mingladon (an army training centre).”

Zaw Tun’s

Source: BBC World Service, “Zaw Tun’s Story,” in *Children of conflict: A human rights issue*, BBC World Service, www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights/childrenofconflict/soldxt.html#02

7. “There was no one in charge of the dormitories and on a nightly basis we were raped. The men would come into our dormitory in the dark, and they would just rape us-you would have a man on top of you and you could not even see who it was. If we cried we were beaten with hose pipes. We were so scared that we did not report the rapes. The youngest girl in our group was aged eleven and she was raped repeatedly.”

Zina, (not her real name), age 19

Source: National Youth Service Program in Zimbabwe
www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/voices-of-young-soldiers

Child soldiers and human rights—data retrieval sheet

In preparation for the letter that you will write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, complete the following chart using both examples provided and information that the class has discovered in independent research. A minimum of two examples must come from your own independent research.

	Name	Country	Age	Violations and articles violated
1.	<i>Fictional example:</i> Juan Carlos	Colombia	14	Kidnapped (9, 11, 33) Forced labour (32, 39) Tortured (19, 37)
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

Student mark: _____