

Global Voices Information Sheet

Charles Taylor and Sierra Leone



A child soldier in Sierra Leone during the civil war. (Photo: Foreign Policy Association)

Background Info

- Sierra Leone is a small country on the west coast of Africa. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many escaped and freed African-American slaves from the United States came to live here.
- In 1991, a civil war began in Sierra Leone between government forces and a rebel group called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).
- The RUF was trained and supported by a warlord in Liberia named Charles Taylor, and his soldiers. Taylor was fighting his own civil war in Liberia. In 1997 he became President of Liberia.
- Taylor helped the RUF smuggle diamonds out of Sierra Leone to raise money for weapons.
- Taylor directed many of the RUF's operations, and encouraged them to commit war crimes. The soldiers of the RUF would often cut off the hands and feet of innocent people they captured.
- The RUF forced thousands of children to become soldiers and do terrible things like cannibalism.
- The war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002 after British peacekeepers defeated the RUF and brought about a ceasefire.
- In 2003, the new government of Sierra Leone asked the United Nations to help them create a court to prosecute those responsible for war crimes during the war.
- In 2003, the Special Court for Sierra Leone formally accused Charles Taylor of war crimes. Soon after, Charles Taylor resigned as President of Liberia and went into exile in Nigeria.
- Three years later, in 2006, Nigeria arrested Charles Taylor and gave him to the UN and Liberia to stand trial. His trial lasted four years. The verdict will be announced April 26, 2012.
- Today Sierra Leone is one of the least-developed countries in the world. It has the world's highest rate of maternal and child mortality. Seventy per cent of the people live in poverty.

Key terms

- **War crime** – To break international laws that govern armed conflict. War crimes can include mistreating prisoners, using torture, deliberately attacking civilians, or using children as soldiers.
- **Blood diamonds** – Also called conflict diamonds. A name given to diamonds that are mined in places where there are wars happening, where the groups who are fighting are selling the diamonds to raise money for their armies. It is now illegal to sell blood diamonds.
- **Maternal and child mortality rates** – The number of mothers and children who die because of complications from pregnancy and childbirth.

Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: civil war, how to handle serious issues
- Course Connections: Language, Social Studies, History, Geography

Materials

- Global Voices column
- Newspapers and magazines
- Board
- Paper and writing utensils
- Research resources (i.e. textbooks, encyclopedias, internet)

Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

Knowledge and Understanding

1. Guided Reading: The Global Voices Column (estimated time: 20 minutes)
 - a. Have students sit in a circle and distribute one copy of the Global Voices column to each student.
 - b. Pre-reading steps:
 - i. Make predictions: ask students to read the title of the column. After doing so, ask them to make predictions as to what the column is going to be about.
 - ii. Introduce vocabulary from the column.
 - iii. Assess prior knowledge: ask students to discuss what they already know about these topics.
 - c. Reading steps:

- i. Go around the circle and have each student read a section of the column to the class, so that everyone gets a turn to read.
 - ii. As students are reading, offer guidance and coaching by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at reading strategy application.
 - d. Post reading steps:
 - i. Encourage students to provide a summary of the column in order to ensure they have understood the series of events.
 - ii. Ask questions about the text to judge comprehension
- 2. Discussing the Global Voices Column (estimated time: 10 minutes)
 - a. Ask students the following suggested questions about the column, encourage them to use evidence from the Global Voices column to support their answers:
 - i. What is the message in this column?
 - ii. What perspectives are presented in this column? Which ones are left out?
 - iii. What problem is presented in this column?

Thinking

- 1. Civil war (estimated time: 10 minutes)
 - a. The column describes a country that continues to suffer the effects of civil wars years after it has ended. After reading the column, ask students a few questions to familiarize them with the concept of civil war.
 - i. Where is Sierra Leone?
 - ii. Where is Uganda?
 - iii. Where is Rwanda?
 - iv. Have you heard of the conflicts in these countries before you read this article?
 - v. What do you know about them?
 - vi. What is the name of the conflict they have all gone through?
 - vii. What is civil war?
 - viii. Do you know any other countries that have had a civil war?
 - ix. Why might it take awhile before the country is 'back to normal'?

Communication

- 1. Dealing with Tough Topics (estimated time: 15 minutes)
- 2. The Global Voices column discusses a serious topic that may be disturbing to its readers. This activity helps students learn how to handle learning about serious issues.
 - a. Divide the class into small groups of three to four students.
 - b. Make sure that each group has an official note-taker and someone who will present the groups' ideas.
 - c. Ask them to brainstorm what they should do when they read, see on the news, or hear about an issue that is shocking, upsetting or makes them concerned.
 - d. After a few minutes, get the attention of the class and have each group present their ideas while you write a master list on the board. This list may include:
 - i. Asking questions.
 - ii. Doing research.
 - iii. Telling other people about the issue.
 - iv. As you learn more you will have more questions, so ask more questions and do more research.
 - v. Find out if there is any way you can help the situation.
 - e. Make sure students know it is important to reach out to people they trust such as friends, parents and teachers when dealing with tough issues. They can help give guidance and perspective and they may be interested in learning more about the issue too.

Application

1. Questioning for Understanding (estimated time: 35 minutes plus presentation time)
 - a. Distribute newspapers and magazines to students.
 - b. Instruct students to flip through the resources and find an article they would like to learn more about. One way to quickly do this is to read headlines. (Students may skip this step if they know of a topic from prior reading or watching the TV). The topic does not need to be upsetting, but rather an issue they know little of and would like to learn more about.
 - c. Allow students 5-10 minutes to look through the resources.
 - d. Students should receive topic approval before moving forward.
 - e. Once they have a topic students will brainstorm a shortlist (3-5) of basic questions for their topic. (i.e. who, what, when, where, why).
 - f. Using the resources at your disposal (i.e. textbooks, encyclopedias, newspapers, the internet, etc.) give students 10-15 minutes to research answers to their questions. Remind students they are just answering their basic questions at this point.
 - g. After this stage, have students brainstorm another list (4-7) of questions they would like to answer now that they know a bit more about the issue.
 - h. Assign these questions for homework.
 - i. In the next class students will share with everyone their topic and two interesting points they learned. They will also answer the question: what will you do now that you know more (i.e. share with others, learn more, volunteer, etc).

Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Craig Kielbuger's story explains what happened when he read an upsetting newspaper article- <http://www.freethechildren.com/aboutus/history/>

Free The Children- www.freethechildren.com

Weday.com- www.weday.com