

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: EARTH CHARTER IV

ideas for
teachers

who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts

into what
and how
they teach

April
2003

"It's almost impossible not to write a poem that is political if you are a person who loves."
-Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Philip Levine

"[Education] is never neutral. When we try to be neutral, like Pilate, we support the dominant ideology. Not being neutral, education must be either liberating or domesticating."
-Brazilian educator Paulo Freire

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We are in a time of war. Shortly after the tragedies of September 11, we entered a "War on Terrorism;" we have bombed sites in the Iraqi "no-fly zone" on a regular basis since the end of the Gulf War in 1991; the U.S. led military action in Iraq began on March 19 with close to 300,000 troops. What is the role of schools in the face of our current realities? How should we teach in a time of war?

Harvard's Peter Gibbon and historian Howard Zinn recently debated just this topic. Gibbon: (*paraphrase*) "The United States is a force for good in the world, and we must celebrate it; celebrate its virtues, triumphs, and glories." Howard Zinn on the other hand stated that we must teach our students to be more critical of government, and that patriotism means being "true and loyal not to the government, but to the principles that underlie democracy." The positions of these two distinguished scholars speak to the matter raised by Paulo Freire above: education is never neutral.

If we try to provide our students with a "safe" classroom, free of the complexities and issues inherent in politics, history, or current events, according to Freire, we are actually advocating the "dominant ideology" of our government. While there are many strong arguments in favor of supporting our troops and rallying behind the President as Commander in Chief, if we also want to expose our students to the many issues surrounding this war so that they may make informed choices, we are teaching that questioning authority is important. To question those in charge often causes conflict, however (take the high school student in Dearborn, Michigan who was recently suspended for wearing a t-shirt to school calling President Bush an international terrorist). The First Amendment and its place in schools is often a contentious topic.

Many teachers and schools recognize the importance of challenging students to debate, investigate, act, and participate in the global discourse concerning the Middle East and other current events. School boards from Oakland, California to Chicago, Illinois have passed resolutions to promote teach-ins and have facilitated discussions on a war with Iraq. This edition of *With Eyes to See* attempts to do the same by providing various classroom ideas and resources on this issue. Despite the challenges and controversies involved in exploring war, patriotism, current events, etc., it is hoped that the following activities will challenge our students to be informed citizens who act to create a world of peace.

(\*This debate was profiled on National Public Radio's Morning Edition show, February 2003. Visit [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) and search with "Zinn Gibbon" to listen to the story and find links to other related topics including President Bush's speech on history and civics education, September 17, 2002.)

CONCERN AMERICA

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Concern America has dedicated all four editions of *With Eyes to See* this year to the Earth Charter, providing activities and resource ideas to help teachers bring the Charter's powerful message into their classrooms. This fourth edition focuses on the Earth Charter's final principle, **Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace**, summarized as follows:

**13.** *Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, including transparency, accountability, participation, and access to justice;*

**14.** *Integrate the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life into education;*

**15.** *Treat all living beings with respect and consideration;*

**16.** *Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.*

In response to the serious times we are in, we have chosen to dedicate this entire newsletter to the last of these subprinciples.

"You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace."  
-Michael Franti

K-12

### Important Resource for Social Justice Education

Many classroom ideas and resources used in this newsletter over the past few years have come from the excellent education journal, **Rethinking Schools**. The Spring 2003 edition, entitled *Fighting for the Truth: Teaching About the War on Iraq*, is a valuable resource. Articles include the use of poetry to teach history and current events, the use of songs to do the same, using history to look at the possible war, military recruiters in schools, and other powerful pieces for use in the classroom. In addition to a subscription to the journal (1-800-669-4192), the current issue (and previous) can be found online at [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org). Another helpful resource is the Rethinking School's list serv which focuses on teaching and writing for justice in K-12 classrooms. To join, send an e-mail message with the word "subscribe" in the subject field to: [RScriticalteach-request@lists.execpc.com](mailto:RScriticalteach-request@lists.execpc.com) (the list is open to all Rethinking Schools subscribers).

"May you have warmth in your igloo, oil in your lamp, and peace in your heart!"  
-Innuite proverb

### Math/Geography/Computers/Social Studies

On February 15 of this year, millions of people marched for peace around the world. When was the last time that so many individuals in every corner of the world took to the streets in solidarity around the same issue? Such an event lends itself to innumerable lessons across the curriculum. The following ideas come from teachers participating in the Rethinking Schools List Serv mentioned above.

Visit [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) where you will find a comprehensive list of the numbers of peace marchers from cities around the world on February 15; Rome: 2.5 million; London: 1.5 million; Tessaaloníki: 40,000. This list of marchers/city can be used for many lessons:

**MATH:** Students can use the numbers of marchers, compared to each other and to the population of each country, to compute percentages, ratios, and fractions, to add/divide/multiply large numbers, and to do graphs. Students will need to use almanacs and atlases to look up populations of the cities/countries in question.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Locating the cities and countries where people marched will take students around the world (Tessaaloníki is in northern Greece). Also, can they locate Iraq, Afghanistan, or Israel/Palestine on a map?

**COMPUTERS:** For students learning to use spreadsheets, or create databases, the list of marchers can be a good resource; search the internet for stories and pictures of marchers. Visit [www.hfxpeace.chebucto.org/worldpeacemap.htm](http://www.hfxpeace.chebucto.org/worldpeacemap.htm) for a map with links to worldwide protest images.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** Using the images the students find of marchers, discuss the various ways people protest. What are their messages? What issues would bring the students to march?

"This season finds us a rather bewildered human race. We have neither peace within nor peace without. Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we turn we see its ominous possibilities. And yet, my friends, the Christmas hope for peace and good will toward all can no longer be dismissed as a kind of pious dream of some utopian. If we don't have good will toward everyone in this world, we will destroy ourselves by the misuse of our own instruments and our own power. Wisdom born of experience should tell us that war is obsolete."

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

3-12

## Stories and Talking

K-12

So how can we promote inner harmony and, eventually and inevitably, harmony between people? By using stories to do three things:

- To encourage children to look inward;
- To present kids with several possible answers to a problem;
- To give children a positive sense of value and purpose - a sense of their own strength and inherent morality. (Marcia Lane)

Stories are a great way to get children, even high school students, to look at conflict, violence, nonviolence, problem solving etc. A good book for this very purpose is Margaret Read MacDonald's *Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About*. With very young children, talking about war in Iraq, or terrorism, is overwhelming and developmentally inappropriate. However, and this is where a book like Ms. MacDonald's works well, age-appropriate stories about solving conflicts cooperatively and nonviolently help children explore conflict on a level they can handle and understand, and as they grow and their world views expand, they can build on this base. When children have tools for dealing with conflict they are better able to navigate their own realities as well as world events. See page four for more ideas of books/stories.

"If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive. If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred."  
-The Bhagavad-Gita

## What Does the Future Look Like?

4-12

How do students see our world today? Do they view the actions of the world's leaders with optimism or cynicism? Are they hopeful for a positive future? A good way to have students answer these questions and to help them explore these issues as well is to assign the following task: "Describe in writing what you imagine the world will be like when you grow up." Although the students are being asked about the future, their answers will inevitably reflect their perception of current events. Use the assignment to probe the above questions, and to get students thinking about how they would change/affirm current policies and actions of our government.

## Poets Against the War

6-12

Poet Sam Hamill turned down an invitation to a White House poetry symposium organized by First Lady Laura Bush because of his opposition to President Bush's policy on Iraq. In response, Hamill sent an email to 50 friends to get submissions for an anthology of anti-war poems to send to the symposium. (Mrs. Bush eventually cancelled the event.) By the next day, Hamill had over 1,500 responses, and the result is *Poets Against the War*. Students can visit their website, [www.poetsagainsthewar.org](http://www.poetsagainsthewar.org) to see the numerous poets and their pieces that are highlighted. In small groups, have the students read through various poems and choose one to share with the class. After exploring the poems as a class, have each student write her/his own poem on peace, war, or any other related issue. Also, it would be interesting and informative to listen to/read a transcript of the story of Mr. Hamill and *Poets Against the War*.

(A story on Mr. Hamill can be found at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org), All Things Considered, February 11, 2003)

A diplomat should be yielding and supple as a liana that can be bent but not broken."  
-A Malay Proverb

## Two Primers and a Video

6-12

To understand the issues surrounding the conflict in Iraq, one must know about U.S. history in the Middle East, the politics of oil, geography, Israel, President Bush's Cabinet members, the United Nations, and other factors. It can therefore be useful to have summaries of these varied topics, or primers, as a guide. Try the following resources: *Understanding the U.S.-Iraq Crisis: A Primer*, by Phyllis Bennis, 24 pages. Call 202-234-9382 for copies, or free at [www.ips-dc.org/iraq/primer.htm](http://www.ips-dc.org/iraq/primer.htm). *Why Another War? A Backgrounder on the Iraq Crisis* by Sarah Graham-Brown and Chris Toensing, 16 pages. Call 202-223-3677, or free at [www.merip.org](http://www.merip.org). An excellent documentary on the Gulf War and the events leading up to it, challenging the official story, is *Hidden Wars of Desert Storm* by Audrey Brohy and Gerald Ungermann, 64 minutes. Available for \$25 through [www.teachingforchange.org](http://www.teachingforchange.org) or 800-763-9131.

# RECOMMENDED

## RESOURCES

The internet continues to provide quick access to numerous resources. The following is a short list of various websites with information on war, peace, Iraq, and alternative media outlets.

- [www.peaceinc.org](http://www.peaceinc.org) (a youth oriented peace site)
- [www.peacecouncil.net](http://www.peacecouncil.net) (publishes a peace newsletter that can be read online)
- [www.nonviolence.org](http://www.nonviolence.org) (many essays on non-violence)
- [www.war-times.org](http://www.war-times.org) (many articles on war from a peace perspective; free print versions available in bulk)
- [www.iraqpeaceteam.org](http://www.iraqpeaceteam.org) (the site of Voices in the Wilderness, a group that has sent observers to live in Iraq since 1996; many good articles and stories by people in Iraq)
- [www.iraqjournal.org](http://www.iraqjournal.org) (reports directly from Iraq)
- [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) ("A coalition of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage")
- [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org) (the site supports the important radio program of the same name available in many cities throughout the country)
- [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org) (many articles from a progressive perspective)
- [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk), and [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) (two English papers with good coverage on world events)

"The first casualty when war comes is truth."  
-Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917

"[During war], when we are asked to chose between truth and contentment, most of us pick contentment."  
-Chris Hedges, War Correspondent

## CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- \* The St. Nicholas Project
- \* Walk Out of Poverty
- \* Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- \* "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- \* School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- \* Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

**Stories for Discussion:** Use any and all of the following stories/books to get discussions going: *The Butter Battle Book*, Dr. Seuss (shows the absurd escalation of conflict between two towns with an open-ended ending); "Hug-o-War," Shel Silverstein (in *Where the Sidewalk Ends*); *Sami and the Time of Troubles*, Florence Parry Heide (the perspective of a 10-year old living in war-torn Beirut); *Stand Up, Speak Out* (on children's rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child) and *Stand Up for your Rights* (on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) by Peace Child International, (both books are written by and for youth). This is only a short list. Share your ideas with other teachers and create a resource list for your school.

**Don't Forget Concern America's Walk Out Of Poverty on April 12!** Call Janine or Eli at Concern America for more information. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa.