WAR, TERRORISM, AND AMERICA’S CLASSROOMS

Teaching in the Aftermath of the September 11th Tragedy

A Rethinking Schools Special Report
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Who We Are

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BY THE EDITORS OF RETHINKING SCHOOLS

In critique of the new anti-terrorism law — the high-sounding USA Patriot Act — the ACLU spells out in chilling detail how the federal government has used this crisis to secure greater power and to erode civil liberties (page 16). In this same vein, U.S. officials have sought to discredit the burgeoning global justice movement, conflating activism with terrorism, claiming that those who oppose “free trade” oppose freedom.

We need to ask the deep “Why?” questions. Nothing can justify the heinous attacks of Sept. 11. But to unequivocally condemn these attacks does not relieve us of the responsibility to explain them. A photograph from a demonstration in Pakistan where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending terms like terrorism, freedom, liberty, patriotism, and unity evoke powerful images, and consequently must be critically examined. When Osama bin Laden was fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan, President Reagan called him a “freedom fighter.” Now he’s a terrorist. In the 1980s the U.S. government considered Nelson Mandela a terrorist. Now he’s a statesman. Language is marshaled for political ends, and students need to reflect on this (page 12).

Educators need to enlist students in questioning the language and symbols that help frame how we understand global events. Terms like terrorism, freedom, liberty, patriotism, and unity evoke powerful images, and consequently must be critically examined. When Osama bin Laden was fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan, President Reagan called him a “freedom fighter.” Now he’s a terrorist. In the 1980s the U.S. government considered Nelson Mandela a terrorist. Now he’s a statesman. Language is marshaled for political ends, and students need to reflect on this (page 12).

Educators need to honor dissent and those who challenge power and privilege as they work for justice. Too often, students are denied knowledge about individuals and social movements that have made the world a better place. They learn that obedience is a synonym for patriotism and that citizenship gives you the right to vote and do as you’re told. The articles in this issue of Rethinking Schools propose a more activist vision. They urge students to question basic premises about terrorism and war. They give students permission to think independently from the Official Story.

Clearly, these principles will play out differently in an early childhood setting than they will in a high school classroom. But they are the starting point for how we propose to help our students confront an era fraught with violence and uncertainty. They remind us that if a better world is possible, we’re the ones who have to build it.
A Time of Gifts

In a time of horror, we have a responsibility to remember how people respond with innumerable acts of kindness and generosity.

BY STEPHEN J. AYould

The patterns of human history mix decency and depravity in equal measure. We often assume, therefore, that such a fine balance of results must emerge from societies made of decent and depraved people in equal numbers. But we need to expose and celebrate the falsity of this conclusion so that, in this moment of crisis, we may reaffirm an essential truth too easily forgotten, and regain some crucial comfort too readily forgone. Good and kind people outnumber all others by thousands to one.

The tragedy of human history lies in the enormous potential for destruction in rare acts of evil, not in the high frequency of evil people. Complex systems can only be built step by step, whereas destruction requires but an instant. Thus, in what I like to call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness, too often unnoticed and invisible as the “ordinary” efforts of a vast majority.

We have a duty, almost a holy responsibility, to record and honor the victorious weight of these innumerable little kindnesses, when an unprecedented act of evil so threatens to distort our perception of ordinary human behavior.

I have stood at ground zero, stunned by the twisted ruins of the largest human structure ever destroyed in a catastrophic moment. (I will discount the claims of a few biblical literalists for the Tower of Babel.) And I have contemplated a single day of carnage that our nation has not suffered since battles that still evoke passions and tears, nearly 150 years later. Antietam, Gettysburg, Cold Harbor. The scene is insufferably sad, but not at all depressing. Rather, ground zero can only be described, in the lost meaning of a grand old word, as “sublime,” in the sense of awe inspired by solemnity.

In human terms, ground zero is the focal point for a vast web of bustling goodness, channeling uncountable deeds of kindness from an entire planet — the acts that must be recorded to reaffirm the overwhelming weight of human decency. The rubble of ground zero stands mute, while a beehive of human activity churns within.

and radiates outward, as everyone makes a selfless contribution, big or tiny according to means and skills, but each of equal worth. My wife and stepdaughter established a depot on Spring Street to collect and ferry needed items in short supply, including facemasks and shoe inserts, to the workers at ground zero. Word spreads like a fire of goodness, and people stream in, bringing gifts from a pocketyard of batteries to a $10,000 purchase of hard hats, made on the spot at a local supply house, and delivered right to us.

I will cite but one tiny story, among so many, to add to the count that will overwhelm the power of any terrorist’s act. And by such tales, multiplied many millionfold, let those few depraved people finally understand why their vision of inspired fear cannot prevail over ordinary decency. As we left a local restaurant to make a delivery to ground zero late one evening, the cook gave us a shopping bag and said: "Here’s a dozen apple brown bettys, our best dessert, still warm. Please give them to the rescue workers." How lovely, I thought, but how meaningless, except as an act of solidarity, connecting the cook to the cleanup. Still, we promised that we would make the distribution, and we put the bag of 12 apple brown bettys atop several thousand facemasks and shoe pads.

In a time of horror, we have a responsibility to remember how people respond with innumerable acts of kindness and generosity.

Not in Our Son’s Name

Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez’s son Greg was one of the World Trade Center victims. The Rodriguizes have asked that people share as widely as possible copies of this Sept. 15 letter they distributed to the media. It was written before the bombing of Afghanistan began.

BY PHYLLIS AND ORLANDO RODRIGUEZ

Our son Greg is among the many missing from the World Trade Center attack. Since we first heard the news, we have shared moments of grief, comfort, hope, despair, fond memories with his wife, the two families, our friends and neighbors, his loving colleagues at Cantor Fitzgerald/ESpeed, and all the grieving families that daily meet at the Pierre Hotel.

We see our hurt and anger reflected among everybody we meet. We cannot pay attention to the daily flow of news about this disaster. But we read enough of the news to sense that our government is heading in the direction of violent revenge, with the prospect of sons, daughters, parents, friends in distant lands, dying, suffering, and nursing further grievances against us. It is not the way to go. It will not avenge our son’s death. Not in our son’s name.

Our son died a victim of an inhuman ideology. Our actions should not serve the same purpose. Let us grieve. Let us reflect and pray. Let us think about a rational response that brings real peace and justice to our world. But let us not as a nation add to the inhumanity of our times.

Teaching Ideas

Discuss how Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez would respond to the policies of the U.S. government in the weeks after they wrote this letter.

Find a newspaper letter to the editor about post-Sep-

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/Sept11
Teaching about Sept. 11

Teachers have a special — and difficult — responsibility to help students extend their circle of caring beyond the victims of Sept. 11 to all of humanity.

The following article by education writer Alfie Kohn was rejected by several leading education publications that have often published his writings. "No one challenged the accuracy of anything in the piece," according to Kohn. "Rather, it was argued that there are times when it’s not appropriate to say things even if they are true."

Kohn was also disinvited as keynote speaker for the March meeting of the California League of Middle Schools (CLMS) conference. Apparently, some on the CLMS board saw a copy of this essay (which had appeared only on Kohn’s website) and convinced the executive director to break the contract with Kohn, even though his planned talk had nothing to do with Sept. 11.

BY ALFIE KOHN

Some events seem momentous when they occur but gradually fade from consciousness, over- taken by fresh headlines and the distractions of daily life. Only once in a great while does something happen that will be taught by future historians. Just such an incident occurred on Sept. 11. The deadly attacks on New York and Washington have left us grappling for support, for words, for a way to make meaning and recover our balance.

Almost 30 years ago, my father suffered a serious heart attack at the age of 42. I remember how he smiled up at me weakly from his hospital bed and made a joke that wasn’t a joke. “I guess I’m not as immortal as I thought I was,” he murmured. This fall we have all suffered an attack that has stolen from us, individually and collectively, our sense of invincibility. Our airplanes can be turned into missiles. Our skyline can be altered. We can’t be sure that our children are safe.

It is unimaginable to me that people could purposefully plan such carnage, could wake up each morning, eat breakfast, and spend the day preparing to destroy thousands of innocent lives along with their own. But while the particulars seem unfathomable, the attack itself had a context and perhaps a motive that are perfectly comprehensible — and especially important for educators to grasp.

The historical record suggests that the United States has no problem with terrorism as long as its victims don’t live here or look like most of us. In the last couple of decades alone, we have bombed Libya, invaded Grenada, attacked Panama, and shelled Lebanon — killing civilians in each instance. We created and funded an army of terrorists to overthrow the elected government of Nicaragua and when the World Court ruled that we must stop, we simply rejected the court’s authority. We engineered coups in Iran, Zaire, Guatemala, and Chile (the last of which coincidentally also took place on Sept. 11).

In 1991, we killed more than 100,000 men, women, and children in Iraq, deliberately wiping out electricity and water supplies with the result that tens of thousands of civilians died from malnutrition and disease. We continue to vigorously defend (and subsidize) Israel’s brutal treatment of Palestinians, which has been condemned by human rights organizations and virtually every other nation on the planet.

We have aided vile tyrants, including some who later turned against us: Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein, and, yes, Osama bin Laden (when his opposition to the Soviets served our purposes). We are not the only nation that has done such things, but we are the most powerful and, therefore, arguably the most dangerous.

Does any of this justify an act of terrorism against us? No. Our history may help to explain, but decidedly does not excuse, the taking of innocent lives. Nothing could. By the same token, though, the September attack does not justify a retaliatory war launched by our government that takes innocent lives abroad. Early polls showed overwhelming American support for revenge, even for killing civilians in Muslim countries. If this seems understandable given what has just happened, then the same must be said about the animosity of our attackers, some of whom may have suffered personally from U.S.-sponsored violence. Understandable in both cases — and excusable in neither.

And so we come to our role as educators. There are excellent resources for helping students to reflect deeply about these specific issues, such as the website www.teachingforchange.org/Sept11.htm. But our broader obligation is to address what writer Martin Amis recently described as Americans’ chronic “deficit of empathy for the sufferings of people far away.” Schools should help children locate themselves in widening circles of care that extend beyond self, beyond country, to all humanity.

Likewise, education must be about developing the skills and disposition to question the official story, to view with skepticism the stark us-against-them (or us good, them bad) portrait of the world and the accompanying dehumanization of others that helps to explain that empathy deficit. Students should also be able to recognize dark historical parallels in the President’s rhetoric, and to notice what is not being said or shown on the news.

One detail of the tragedy carries a striking pedagogical relevance. Official announcements in the south tower of the World Trade Center repeatedly instructed everyone in the building to stay put, which posed an agonizing choice: follow the official directive or disobey and evacuate.

Here we find a fresh reason to ask whether we are teaching students to think for themselves or simply to do what they’re told.

Ultimately, though, the standard by which to measure our schools is the extent to which the next generation comes to understand — and fully embrace — this simple truth: The life of someone who lives in Kabul or Baghdad is worth no less than the life of someone in New York or from our neighborhood.

Alfie Kohn (www.alfiekohn.org) is the author of eight books on education and human behavior, including The Schools Our Children Deserve and What to Look for in a Classroom. ©2001 by Alfie Kohn.

An Alternative to War

BY MICHAEL RATNER AND JULES LOBEL

A number of organizations and people have asked us about alternatives to the use of military force, the legality of the United States employing military force, and what can and should be done under international law. Set forth below are some principles that should guide the United States actions, and steps the United States can and should take that are short of using force.

We believe that at this point it is crucial to prevent a unilateral and disproportionate response by the United States. Reliance upon the United Nations has the potential to do that, it will also provide a forum for the trials of those suspected of terrorism and crimes against humanity. We recognize that our suggestions are not long-term solutions. These will only come when the government of the United States and others recognize that they must change their policies and make a more just world.

Key International Law Principles and an Alternative To the Use of Military Force

1. The UN Charter prohibits the use of force except in matters of self-defense. Article 2(4) and Article 51. A country is not permitted to use military force for purposes of retaliation, vengeance, and punishment. In other words, unless a future attack on the United States is imminent, it cannot use military force. This means that even if the United States furnished evidence as to the authors of the Sept. 11 attack it cannot use military force against them. To this extent the congressional resolution authorizing the President to use force against the perpetrators of the attack on Sept. 11 is a violation of international law. Instead, the U.S. must employ other means including extradition, and resolutions of the Security Council, which could eventually authorize the use of force to effectuate the arrest of suspects.

The United States will argue that the attack on Sept. 11 was an armed attack on the United States and that it has the right to use self-defense against that attack. Even though the attack is over, it presumably would claim that those who initiated the attack were responsible for prior attacks and are planning such attacks in the future. At that time, President Bush has said that the “war” on terrorism would be lengthy, implying that it would go on for years.

In order to reject this self-defense claim, the U.S. would need to present evidence to the Security Council not only as to the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attack, but evidence that future attacks are planned and imminent. They have not yet done so. Even if the U.S. can
What Is Islam?

BY SEMYA HAKIM

The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunesia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively. Arab countries have a rich diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. These include Kurds, Armenians, Berbers and others. There are over 200 million Arabs.

What is the Muslim World?

There are an estimated 1.2 billion Muslims in the world. The Organization of Islamic Countries has 55 member states. The ten countries with the largest Muslim population are: Indonesia (170.3 million), Pakistan (136 million), Bangladesh (106 million), India (103 million), Turkey (62.4 million), Iran (60.7 million), Egypt (53.7 million), Nigeria (47.7 million), and China (37.1 million). Of these countries only Egypt is an Arab country. Most Arabs are Muslims, but most Muslims are not Arabs.

Who is a Muslim?

A Muslim is a follower of Islam. [See article on this page. The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee also has an information sheet on Islam.]

What is the Middle East?

The Middle East is a loose term, not always used to describe the same territory. It usually includes the Arab countries from Egypt east to the Persian Gulf, plus Israel and Iran. Turkey is sometimes considered part of the Middle East, sometimes part of Europe. Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are usually described as South Asia.

Who are Arab Americans?

Arab Americans are Americans of Arab descent. They trace their roots with roots in each Arab country, but most originate from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. There are also substantial communities from Egypt, Yemen, and Iraq. The first immigrants arrived in the late 19th century. A second wave of immigration started after World War II, and still continues. The largest communities live in the Detroit area.

Marvin Wingfield is director of education and outreach at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). For more resources, go to www.adc.org. Reprinted with permission.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sep11

Facts about Arabs

BY MARVIN WINGFIELD

Who is an Arab?

“Arab” is a cultural and linguistic term. It refers to those who speak Arabic as their first language. Arabs are united by culture and by history. Arabs are not a race. Some have blue eyes and red hair; others are dark skinned, most are somewhere in between. Most Arabs are Muslims but there are also millions of Christian Arabs and thousands of Jewish Arabs, just as there are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Americans.

What is the Arab World?

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A Muslim in New Mexico prays east, towards Mecca, during his midday prayers.
Letters to the Universe
An English teacher draws on student experiences with losing a loved one to help them cope with the Sept. 11 tragedy.

BY TRACY WAGNER

The night of Sept. 11, unable to stop watching the constant news coverage of the day’s tragedies, I knew I had to plan a special lesson for the following day. I pulled an old box out of my closet, decorated it with bits of postcards and envelopes, and, after cutting a slit in the top, labeled it “Letters to the Universe.”

Earlier in the day, I had encountered some students who said they were “unaffected” by the attacks. I knew my students needed a way to begin processing the attacks, and I hoped the lesson would be a start. I also wanted to help my students understand the power of empathy, and how people gain strength by coming together in times of crisis.

I started out my first hour class by asking students what they had heard on the news and how it made them feel. Some students shared; most remained silent.

“I felt very sad watching the news last night, and even though I felt that way, I still couldn’t turn the TV off,” I said, trying to model that it was OK to feel frustated and upset.

My lesson plan was based on the idea of the guided freewrite — students are given a topic and given time to write whatever they want. I passed out a sheet that asked students to “share a time in your life when you lost someone, and offer advice from your experience and what you learned.” The students were to write their response on the back of the sheet.

Familiar with guided freewrites, my students knew they would have 15 minutes to write quietly and that they would not have to sign their name. After helping a few of the students choose whom they would write to, I sat down to write my letter.

When I called “time’s up,” we folded up our letters and dropped them into the “Letters to the Universe” box. Then, I opened the lid and students passed around the box, each picking out an anonymous letter. The students began to read.

Marcus, a boy in the front row, started to cry. “Man, this is so sad, so sad. Ms. Wagner, come look at this,” he said.

The writer had shared the experience of losing his grandmother the year before, saying, “The day she died part of my heart did, too.” The writer advised “be strong for your family and never forget the good times you had with your loved ones. Our time on earth is short and we all know that.” I knew that Marcus’s grandmother had died earlier that year, too.

Marcus was the first to volunteer to read a letter. Soon, a panel of readers had assembled in the front of the room. One by one, students passed up letters through the rows to a reader who read it to the group. Sometimes, students who were listening asked that a particular line, or an entire letter, be read again. Following are excerpts from two of the letters:

Dear Survivor in the Second Building,

I’m writing to say how bad I feel about what happened yesterday. I’m sure it must have been terrifying to see or hear the other building getting hit. What could you see from the window?

What floor were you on? I would think if you were on a high floor it would have been difficult to fight your way through the crowded staircases to get outside. What were your first thoughts when you heard the plane hit the building and when you saw the building collapse?

Do you know anyone or have any friends inside that didn’t get out on time?

What do you feel about the country who did this to us . . .

Sincerely,
A Friend

Dear Family of A Lost Loved One,

I would like to share my condolences to a family of a lost loved one. I have once shared your experience before with the loss of my grandpa. It is hard to lose a loved one, but you can’t stop living, you have to keep going on living your life. Losing someone can be hard especially in the act of a terrorist attack. From experience I learned that you must go on living your life because time don’t stop for the people who are still living.

With my Condolences.

The student panel of readers read right up until the bell. Surely, not all students were as engaged as I had hoped. I had envisioned each of them reading a letter out loud instead of a uniform panel of readers. I had hoped that more students would feel comfortable saying about a letter. “That’s mine!” I also knew that teaching about Sept. 11 was not a one-time event. I continued to plan lessons almost instant-by-instant for the following week: playing the game of “telephone” to make students think on how many people information had passed through before landing in their ear; finding a piece of factual news information and responding with poetry or artwork; simply discussing what we knew, and sharing our fears.

I do not know what the future holds. But I hold tight to the hope that my students remember how good it feels to write, listen, and to respond together in times of tragedy.

Tracy Wagner currently teaches English 9 and 10 at Madison East High School, in Madison, Wisconsin. All student’s names have been changed.

“first writing since”

BY SUHEIR HAMMAD

Following are excerpts from a poem by Palestinian/African-American poet Suheir Hammad. It was the first poem she wrote after Sept. 11. The complete poem is available at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11.

1. there have been no words. i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen. not really.

no poetry in the ashes south of canal street.
not one word.

today is a week, and seven is of heavens, gods, science.
evident out my kitchen window is an abstract reality.

sky where once was steel.
smoke where once was flesh.

fire in the city air and i feared for my sister’s life in a way never before.

and, then, and now, i fear for the rest of us.

first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot’s heart failed, the plane’s engine died.

then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.

please god, after the second plane, please, don’t let it be anyone who looks like my brothers.

i do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.

i have never been so hungry that i wished hunger

i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen.
not really.

even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being, never this broken.

more than ever, i believe there is no difference.
the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the difference between indians, afghans, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus.
more than ever, there is no difference . . .

3. the dead are called lost and their families hold up shaky printouts in front of us through screens smoked up.

we are looking for iris, mother of three. please call with any information. we are searching for priti, last seen on the 103rd floor. she was talking to her husband on the phone and the line went. please help us find george, also known as adel. his family is waiting for him with his favorite meal.

i am looking for my son, who was delivering coffee. i am looking for my sister girl, she started her job on monday.

i am looking for peace. i am looking for mercy. i am looking for evidence of compassion. any evidence of life. i am looking for life.

Suheir Hammad is author of a book of poems, Born Palestinian, Born Black, and the memoir Drops Of This Story. Reprinted with permission.
Dear Parents …
A teacher offers help with understanding how young children may react to tragedy and war.

The following is condensed from a letter that Ann Pelo sent to parents of children at the Hilltop Children’s Center, where Pelo teaches in Seattle. The letter was written shortly after the bombing of Afghanistan began.

BY ANN PELO

“What really matters now is love. Strength, love, courage, love, kindness, love. That is really what matters. There has always been evil, and there will always be evil, but there has always been good, and there is good now.”

These are heavy days, full of the ache of violence, death, and devastation in the United States and in Afghanistan. We adults feel the weight of war in both tangible and subtle ways as our lives shift focus and our thoughts open wider and wider. The children feel the weight of war, as well, though they may not have the language for their questions, fears, and uncertainty. We see children wrestling to absorb and understand the violence in New York, Washington D.C., and Afghanistan in a range of ways:

• Children are more fragile these days. Some children are waking at night with bad dreams — children who typically sleep long and soundly through the night. Many parents have described their children as needing extra reassurance; they notice their children clinging to them with unusual intensity, or crying more easily. Some children have expressed fear about unfamiliar people who may be “bad guys.”

• Children are more volatile these days. Kids’ voices are loud and their feelings are raw; we hear children snapping at each other and giving way to quick anger as they play and work together. And there is a lot more physical conflict.

• Children are playing about and trying out violence. We’ve seen children intentionally break or damage other children’s block and Lego constructions, something that hadn’t happened until recent weeks. Gun play and “bad guy” play are ever-present in our school, and I’ve heard from some parents that they’ve seen their children take up gun play at home in new and startling ways. There’s a recurring game in our classroom in which firefighters are trapped in a burning building and are hurt and killed before the rescue workers can reach them. Children build tall towers with blocks and knock them down, over and over and over. Children have begun to make poison foods in their play and feed them to bad guys; several days last week, children hunted down and captured bad guys, throwing them into the oven to “roast and cook and eat them for supper.”

WHAT WE CAN DO

Here are some thoughts about how parents and teachers can support children during this time of unrest and pain:

• Engage the children in tenderness. At home, create time for long, cozy evenings on the couch with a pile of good books to read together; make dates for baking yummy treats together; linger over family photos and home videos that anchor your child in the joys and safety of your family. Your child may ask for your help with things that you know she can do by herself; this is a great time to offer that extra help. If your child seems particularly edgy, pushing limits and testing boundaries, it may help to snuggle up together for a song or a story rather than enforcing the limits just then; your child’s misbehavior may be his way to ask for reassurance. It’ll probably be easier for him to navigate family rules and boundaries after some tender loving from you.

• Affirm children’s feelings, acknowledging that it’s all right to be frightened, confused, or angry. Reassure your child that she or he is safe — and, too, recognize with her or him that there are folks in the world right now who aren’t safe and that we can feel compassion and grief for them. This is a tricky balance: we want to comfort our children, and we want to cultivate in them the compassion and generosity of spirit that will add to a culture of peace.

• Anchor children’s days with familiar rhythms and rituals. And consider creating a new family ritual about peace, love, or compassion, perhaps lighting a candle, singing a peace song, or inviting the folks gathered at the dinner table to share an image of beauty, an experience of kindness, or an expression of love.

• Ask your child periodically what she thinks is happening and what she is feeling about the war to open up opportunities for her to express her ideas. It’ll be helpful for your child if you simply listen and acknowledge her thinking, rather than correcting her misunderstandings as she talks; after she’s had a chance to share her thinking, you can share your understandings of and feelings about what’s happening.

• Monitor gun play and “bad guy” play. This play provides children with a way to gain a sense of control and power; as I watched the children in my classroom capture, roast, and eat “bad guys” last week, I was struck by the power in their play: they captured and disarmed bad guys and swallowed their power; taking it into their bodies, conquering it absolutely. You might want to add new perspectives to his play about bad guys, hoping to shift him from one-dimensional understandings to an expanded sense of bad guys as fully human people. You can pose questions like: What does the bad guy’s family do while he’s fighting? How can you get the bad guy to listen to you?

• Stay alert for issues of racism and bias. Children are likely absorbing both the subtle and overt racist images in our culture that define “bad guys” as people with olive-colored or brown skin, an Arabic accent or language, who dress in long, flowing gowns and wrap their heads in cloth, and who pray in mosques. When your child expresses a biased understanding, it’s important to counter it right away. For example, if your child comments that “People who talk funny are bad guys,” you might intervene to say: “To say someone talks funny is not okay. People talk differently because people in our city, country, and world speak different languages. Sometimes people sound funny to us when we haven’t heard it before; we’re not used to the sounds of a new language.”

• Teach peace to children. Share stories of peace heroes. Continue to emphasize the importance of resolving conflicts in ways that honor the needs of everyone involved in the conflict. Talk about peace as an action, rather than as a passive absence of conflict.

Talking to Children

BY EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Should children watch coverage about tragedies and warfare?

It depends on the age and maturity of the children. Parents may decide that some shows and topics are inappropriate. However, if children are going to watch programs about the event, we recommend that a parent or caregiver watch with them. Afterwards, talking together about reactions to the coverage and feelings about the event in general can help children make sense of a seemingly senseless tragedy.

How can I judge if a child is ready to talk about difficult events?

Most children from age four to five and above would appreciate talking with adults they trust. In the media there is daily discussion of difficult topics, and it is likely that children know about them. However, it is also quite likely that they have some confusion about the facts and the magnitude of the danger they personally face. They often have mistaken information, questions, and some strong feelings. Often children are hesitant to share their questions and fears with adults. For this reason, we recommend that adults open the way for children to talk about their concerns.

How do I open up the subject with children?

The key word here is LISTEN. Most experts agree that it is best NOT to open up a conversation with children by giving them a lecture — even an informal, introductory lecture — on the particular tragedy that is on the news. Don’t burden children with information they may not be ready for. The best approach is to listen carefully to children’s spontaneous questions and comments, and then respond to them in an appropriate, supportive way. Let children’s concerns, in their own words, guide the direction of the discussion.


Ann Pelo has taught at Hilltop Children’s Center for 10 years and is co-author, with Fran Davidson, of That’s Not Fair: A Teacher’s Guide to Activism with Young Children (Redleaf Press, 2000).
Poetry in a Time of Crisis
High school educators call on the power of poetry to help students critique injustice and develop empathy.

BY LINDA CHRISTENSEN

O n a post-Sept. 11 visit to New York City, my daughter Gretchen and I caught a taxi to a "Poetry in Crisis" reading at Cooper Union. After we settled into the taxi, Gretchen pointed to a note written in ink on the leather seat, "This cabbie doesn't have an American flag. Don't tip him." The cabbie was an immigrant. From his accent and appearance, I'd guess he was from India. During our short visit, just about every taxi we rode in flew the stars and stripes. It felt mandatory. Obligatory patriotism.

Immigrant cabbies had reason to be fearful. Following the Sept. 11 tragedy, Arab-Americans and other Middle Eastern- or Central-Asian looking people were attacked at an alarming rate.

In an effort to raise student awareness about such anti-immigrant attacks, I worked with Renée Bald, a social studies teacher in Portland, OR, to develop a poetry lesson that highlighted the attacks and put them in historical context. We wanted students to see how fear too easily turns into repression based on religious or racial identity.

One of the most powerful poems we used was "first writing since," by Suheir Hammad, an African-American/Palestinian. Hammad wrote this poem a week after the Sept. 11 attacks, and I read the poem in its entirety to the class. (The poem is available at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11. Excerpts are on page 7.)

Prior to reading, Renee and I told students: "Mark places that remind you of your own reactions. Also, mark lines that show us her fears." Hammad, like many of us, identified with the survivors who lost loved ones, who would wait at home for a phone call, a key in the door, the familiar shuffle of feet on the porch to let us know our family, our friends escaped. But as a Palestinian American, Hammad also captures the fear that many Arabs felt after witnessing the event.

CHAOS AND JUSTICE

To further underscore the current discrimination and violence against Arab Americans, we handed out brief summaries of discriminatory acts that occurred in the first two weeks after the attacks. (See article, page 17. For the longer list we used in our classroom, go to: www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11.)

Prior to reading about 20 of the attacks, we told students that they would be writing a poem about discrimination or injustice. To prepare for this, we encouraged them to highlight incidents that created a visceral image for them, that created a visceral reaction or helped them understand the current crisis with the moment. We see the father with his arms folded; we hear them talk; we watch the waitress ignore them.

Then we asked students to create a poem detailing one of the acts of discrimination against Arab Americans we read about earlier. We encouraged students to use details to help their readers see and hear the story in their poem. Freshman Rebecca Jacobson wrote:

The News Comes In

The news comes in early that morning.
"Terrorists attack."
"This is war."

Everyone says it is so remote
so not real.

But not to me.

I walk down the street
bombarded with glares
jeers
insults.

I hang my head in shame.
"You did this to us!
"Go back to your own country!" they scream.

What do these people not realize?

This is my country.
I come home, broken, and see my house is, too.

Windows smashed
spray paint decorating the walls
in an array of obscenities.

"Why?" I ask. "Why?"

Out of the corner of my eye
I see my neighbor emerge from her unblemished home.
She glances at me, wary
then turns around.

Though not without fusing me a look
that could slice steel.

Poetry is only a piece of a much broader social justice curriculum that aims to critique injustice and build empathy. But at this moment in our nation’s history, poetic intimacy seems an especially valuable strategy to invite our students to touch the lives of others — others who may be in urgent need of allies. 

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Thirty-year U.S. resident and Egyptian native Mostafa Abdallah discusses reaction to the Sept. 11 attacks in the Arab-American community.
I t was Sept. 12 when Rafael, one of my fifth grade students, pointed out the window and asked, “What would you do if terrorists were outside our school and tried to bomb us?”

Clearly, the tragic events of the day before had left my students confused and fearful. Such questioning continued when the United States started bombing Afghans in October. “Will they bomb us like we are bombing them?” one student asked.

Sometimes we stop and immediately talk about such questions. Other times we postpone them until the day’s lesson on “current events.” I often have students write their questions in a spiral notebook, labeled “Questions That We Have,” that sits in front of the class.

It quickly became clear that a single lesson or even series of lessons on Sept. 11 would not suffice. I realized that two things were necessary. First, students must express and share their emotions. Second, they must start to look at the broader context of global injustices. Following are some of the ways I have started to approach these complicated issues.

WRITING AND POETRY

I want my students to be comfortable expressing their fears about war and terrorism. This allows for emotional release and also provides insight into my students’ thoughts on topics such as stereotypes, Islam, immigration, or grief about loss of a family member. I help students express their feelings partly by encouraging them to write in their journals, and by having a bulletin board with photos, maps, and students’ writings.

Two poems, in particular, provided a structure for students to express their feelings. One poem is “If I Were in Charge of the World,” by Judith Viorst (1991). After reading the poem together I encouraged students to write their own versions. One wrote:

If I were in charge of the world there would not be any stereotypes in the world. bin Laden who accus...
Images of War
A bilingual elementary teacher helps students think about the images of war that they see—and don’t see—in the U.S. media.

By Kelley Dawson

On Monday Oct. 9, the day after the U.S. government began to bomb Afghanistan, I asked my fourth grade students about the images they remembered from the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center. I approached the discussion with both enthusiasm and apprehension. I knew it is important for students to understand world events and different perspectives on what is happening. But I teach all subjects in Spanish in a two-way bilingual program with Spanish- and English-dominant children, and I know that sometimes the English-dominant children have difficulty when they must use Spanish to understand and express complex ideas.

It was not the first time we had talked about Sept. 11. We had also discussed the actual events and students’ feelings, and stereotypes and hate crimes against Arab Americans. However, this was the first time I specifically asked students to talk about the images they had seen. Part of my focus on images was logistical. In the absence of sufficient Spanish language material, I gravitated toward images, which can be discussed in any language one chooses. I also felt compelled to help students examine photos of the war on Afghanistan because, especially in those early days of bombing, the media did not portray with either words or pictures the suffering that must have been occurring in Afghanistan as a result of the U.S. attack. Through our discussion, I hoped to help students develop a critical perspective on the stories and images that they and their families are consuming everyday.

Even though the images of Sept. 11 were almost a month old, when I asked students about images from that day, an animated conversation ensued. Native speakers of Spanish and Spanish language learners shared their memories in Spanish.

"Yo vi las personas saltando de los edificios," said one student. "I saw the people jumping from the buildings."

"Yo vi la gente en la calle corriendo y saltando de escape," said another. "I saw people in the streets running and trying to escape."

"Vi los bomberos que se murieron tratando de salvar a las personas," remembered a third student. "I saw the firefighters who died trying to save people."

After several comments about people, I asked if they remembered images that did not involve people. More hands.

"Los edificios cuando el avión chocó" ["The buildings when the plane crashed"]

"Los edificios cuando se cayeron" ["The buildings when they collapsed"]

"Los zapatos de una mujer que se quedó atrapada" ["The shoes of a woman who was trapped"]

I then asked the students what they had seen on TV or in the newspaper since the Sept. 11 attacks began. In groups of four, students studied the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel or the New York Times. Their task was to look at all the images and pick out one image of the war in Afghanistan that impressed their group.

When they were done, we gathered as a class to look at the images. Two groups shared pictures of bombs ready to be launched. One group shared a picture of an anti-U.S. demonstration in Pakistan where a Pakistani demonstrator had set himself on fire while burning a U.S. flag. Another group showed a picture of an Osama bin Laden target available at a firearms store for $30. ("Por qué hay tiendas que venden armas?" one student wanted to know. ["Why are there stores that sell guns?"])

One group found a page which had two different pictures of planes: one plane that dropped bombs and another that dropped food. One student offered a thoughtful response: "Después de bombardear, van a tener que mandar comida para los niños que perdieron sus padres." ["After they bomb, they will need to send food in for the children who lost their parents in the bombing"].

We finished looking at the pictures. ["¿Hay algo que no estamos viendo?" I asked. ["Is there anything we’re not seeing?"]]

A few hands went up slowly. Rosana said: "No estamos viendo las personas de Afganistán que se están muriendo." ["We’re not seeing the people from Afghanistan who are dying."]

Roberto spoke next: "No estamos viendo la guerra." ["We’re not seeing the war."]

Several weeks have gone by since our initial discussion. In our local newspaper, pictures of human suffering in Afghanistan remain scarce; the images are still dominated by photos of fighters from the Northern Alliance and maps with dots and starbursts to show where the bombs are falling. (The New York Times has done a better job of expanding its images, but my students only see those photos if I bring them to class.)

In the weeks to come, I know I will need to build on our initial discussions. I want to help my students to move beyond the compassion they felt for those who died in the Sept. 11 attacks, and develop a sense of the tragedy the U.S. government is imposing on many innocent Afghani people. I also want my students to ask whether the U.S. media are reliably reporting what is happening around the world.

There are some people who have said publicly that while they have been opposed to previous American military interventions, they consider the present action in Afghanistan as a “just war.” I have puzzled over this. How can a war be “truly just” which involves the daily killing of civilians, which is terrorizing the people of Afghanistan, causing hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children to leave their homes to escape the bombs, which has little chance of finding those who planned the Sept. 11 tragedy (and even if found, no chance that this would stop terrorism); and which can only multiply the ranks of people who are angry at this country, from whose ranks terrorists are born?

I believe the supporters of the war have confused a “just cause” with a “just war.” A cause may be just—like ending terrorism. But it does not follow that going to war on behalf of that cause, with the inevitable mayhem that follows, is just.

—Howard Zinn, historian and author of A People’s History of the United States

Kelley Dawson teaches fourth grade at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, and is an editorial associate of Rethinking Schools.
Whose “Terrorism”?  
A classroom activity enlists students in defining terrorism and then applying their definitions to world events.

BY BILL BIGELOW

Shortly after the horrific Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President Bush announced these as acts of war, and he proclaimed a “war on terrorism.” But what exactly was to be the target of this war? What precisely did the president mean by terrorism? Despite uttering the words terror, terrorist or terrorism 32 times in his Sept. 20 speech to the nation, he never once defined terrorism.

Teachers need to engage our students in a deep critical reading of terms — such as “terrorism,” “freedom,” “patriotism,” and “our way of life” — that evoke vivid images but can be used for ambiguous ends (see sidebar, page 13 for definitions of “terrorism”).

LESSON ON TERRORISM

I wanted to design a lesson that would get students to surface the definitions of terrorism that they carry around — albeit most likely unconsciously. And I wanted them to apply their definitions to a number of episodes, historical and contemporary, that involved some kind of violence or destruction. I didn’t know for certain, but my hunch was that as students applied definitions consistently they might be able to call into question the “We’re Good/They’re Bad” dichotomies that have become even more pronounced on the political landscape.

I wrote up several “What is Terrorism?” scenarios, but instead of using the actual names of countries involved I substituted Country A, Country B, etc. Given the widespread conflation of patriotism with support for U.S. government policies, I had no confidence that students would be able to label an action taken by their government as “terrorism” unless I attached pseudonyms to each country.

In the following scenario I used the example of U.S. support for the Nicaraguan contras in the 1980s. Country A is the United States, B is Nicaragua, and the country next door is Honduras:

“The government of Country A is very unhappy with the government of Country B, whose leaders came to power in a revolution that threw out the former Country B dictator. Country A decides to do everything in its power to overthrow the new leaders of Country B. It begins funding a guerrilla army that attacks Country B from another country next door. Country A also builds army bases in the next door country and allows the guerrilla army to use its bases. Country A supplies almost all of the weapons and supplies of the guerrilla army fighting Country B. The guerrillas generally try to avoid fighting Country B’s army. Instead, they attack clinics, schools, cooperative farms. Sometimes they mine the roads. Many, many civilians are killed and maimed by the Country A-supported guerrillas. Consistently, the guerrillas raid Country B and then retreat into the country next door where Country A has military bases.”

Question: 1. Which, if any, of these activities should be considered “terrorism” according to your definition? 2. Who are the “terrorists”? 3. What more would you need to know to be more sure of your answer?

I knew that in such compressed scenarios lots of important details would be missing, hence, I included question number three to invite students to consider other details that might influence their decisions.

Other scenarios included Israeli soldiers taunting and shooting children in Palestinian refugee camps, with the assistance of U.S. military aid, Indian farmers burning Monsanto-supplied, genetically-modified cotton crops and threatening to destroy Monsanto offices; the 1998 U.S. cruise missile attack on Sudan’s main pharmaceutical plant; and sanctions against Iraq that according to the UN reports have killed as many as a half million children. (See article, page 21.) The full list of situations can be found at www.rethinkingschools.org/sep11.

DEFINING TERRORISM

As I’m on leave this year, my colleague, Sandra Childs, invited me into her Franklin High School class-
Enduring Terrors
- Number of people who die of hunger every day: 24,000
- Number of children killed by diarrhea every day: 6,020
- Number of children killed by measles every day: 2,100
- Number of malnourished children in developing countries: 149 million
- Number of people without access to safe drinking water: 1.1 billion
- Number of people without access to adequate sanitation: 2.4 billion
- Number of people living on less than one dollar a day: 1.2 billion
- Number of African children under 15 living with HIV: 1.1 million
- Number of children without access to basic education: 100 million
- Number of illiterate adults: 875 million
- Number of women who die each year in pregnancy and childbirth: 515,000
- Annual average number of people killed by drought and famine 1972-96: 73,606
- Annual average number of children killed in conflict 1990-2000: 200,000
- Annual average number of children made homeless by conflict 1990-2000: 1.2 million

Definitions of Terrorism

In a 1998 speech on terrorism, the late Pakistani scholar activist Eqbal Ahmad described his examination of at least 20 official documents dealing with terrorism. “Not one defines the word,” he said. “All of them explain it, express it emotively, polemically, to arouse our emotions rather than exercise our intelligence.”

For example, in a 1984 speech, Reagan’s Secretary of State, George Shultz offered four different “definitions”:

1. “Terrorism is a form of political violence.”
2. “Terrorism is a threat to Western civilization.”
3. “Terrorism is a menace to Western moral values.”

The first is simply a useless tautology, defining a word with that same word. The second is a kind of definition, but is too broad to be meaningful. And the third and fourth “definitions” propose that terrorism is a Really Bad Thing done by Other People. — Other People, presumably, who are not Westerners.

My interpretation: The more students understand about the exercise of U.S. power in the world — both military and economic — the less likely they are to want to extend it.

ECONOMIC TERRORISM

After I’d used the “What is Terrorism?” situations with Sandra’s classes, I realized that, with the exception of sanctions, all of them were incidents of direct attacks on civilians or property. Did my examples narrow students’ consideration of “terrorism”? In her article “Solidarity Against All Forms of Terrorism,” Indian environmentalist and scholar Vandana Shiva urges us to embrace a more expansive notion of terrorism. She asks us to consider “economic policies which push people into poverty and starvations as a form of terrorism,” such as International Monetary Fund/World Bank-mandated structural adjustment programs that force governments to cut food and medical programs, with the full knowledge of the misery this will engender. In India, Shiva writes:

“70 million tribals who have been flooded out of their homes by dams over the past 4 decades were also victims of terrorism — they have faced the terror of technology and destructive development. … The whole world repeatedly watched the destruction of the World Trade Center towers, but the destruction of millions of sacred shrines and homes and farms by forces of injustice, greed, and globalization go unnoticed.”

To help students consider whether some situations could be considered economic terrorism, I’ve added several new “What is Terrorism?” scenarios. One deals with deaths in southern Africa from AIDS, where, for instance, international banks have forced the Zambian government to pay annual debt service charges greater than spending on health and education combined and where, according to the United Nations, life expectancy will soon drop to 15 years, a level not seen in the Western world since medieval times. Another new scenario focuses on transnational corporations that knowingly pay wages that are insufficient to sustain life.

Harvesting Student Opinions

Watching students attempt to apply their definitions of terrorism, I was impressed by their eagerness to be consistent. As Sandra and I wandered from group to group, we heard students arguing over whether there was a distinction between oppression and terrorism. Most groups wanted more information on the motives of various actors. Some insisted that if a country supported terrorist acts in another country, then it too was a terrorist, others held that a supporting country could not be held fully responsible for the actions of the actual perpetrators — but if a country knew about terrorism enabled with its funds, and did nothing to prevent it, then it too could be considered guilty of terrorism.

Although this activity was far too involved to be briefly contained in an 83-minute class, by the end, many students came to important insights. One student said, “Ever since they announced that we were going to have a war, I’ve wondered who or what a terrorist is.” Another student said, “The U.S. government won’t define terrorism because they don’t want to be able to be considered terrorists.”

These comments echoed Eqbal Ahmad’s insight that countries that have no intention of being consistent will resist defining terms. As one student wrote after countries that have no intention of being consistent were considered terrorists: “If you don’t want to be able to define terrorism, then it too could be considered guilty of terrorism.”

It’s not our role to teach students how to define terrorism, but rather to help them identify the phenomenon. As we wrapped up in one class, Sandra asked a wonderful question: “What difference do you think it would make if students all over the country were having the discussion that we’re having today?”

I asked students why they thought the U.S. government had failed to offer a clear definition of terrorism. One student said, “If you don’t define terrorism, I have wondered who or what the U.S. government is fighting.”

Some insisted that if a country supported terrorist acts in another country, then it too was a terrorist. As one student wrote after countries that have no intention of being consistent were considered terrorists, “If you don’t want to be able to define terrorism, then it too could be considered guilty of terrorism.”

The Sept. 11 attacks were a monstrous calling card from a world gone horribly wrong. This message may have been written by bin Laden (who knows?) and delivered by his couriers, but it could well have been signed by the ghosts of the victims of America’s old wars. The millions killed in Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, the 17,500 killed when Israel bombed the U.S. military base in Iraq in 1983, the 200,000 Iraqis killed in Operation Desert Storm, the thousands of Palestinians who have died fighting Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. And the millions who died, in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Haiti, Chechnya, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, at the hands of all the terrorist, dictators and genocidists whom the American government supported, trained, bankrolled and supplied with arms. And this is far from being a comprehensive list.

The U.S. government is ill-placed to lecture the world about terrorism, especially when it has never bothered to define it. Writing in the British daily The Guardian, Indian novelist Arundhati Roy offered the perspective of an individual who is on the receiving end of U.S. global power:

“Let’s clarify with students what precisely we mean by terrorism. And then let’s encourage students to apply this definition to U.S. conduct in the world.”

Underlying this curriculum demand for consistency is the basic democratic, indeed human, premise that the lives of people from one nation are not worth more than the lives of people from another. A Pakistani university student, Nabiq Ahmed, expressed this sentiment to the Christian Science Monitor: “There is only one way for America to be a friend of Islam. And that is if they consider our lives to be as precious as their own.”
‘Stand Up! It’s the Law!’
An elementary teacher asks her students what the Pledge of Allegiance means to them, and strives to protect the rights of those who choose to sit out the Pledge.

BY KATE LYMAN

My seven-year-old grandson is the only one who remains seated while his classmates recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Ever since he could talk, Caetano has been proud of his Brazilian heritage. When people would stumble over the pronunciation of his name, he’d say, “It’s Caetano, Cae-ta-no. After a famous Brazilian singer.”

Sitting out the Pledge was a difficult decision for Caetano, one he lost sleep over. Despite peer pressure (“You have to stand up. It’s the law!” other children told him) he has stuck with his decision.

But what of other children who — whether for family, religious or political beliefs — do not equate being a good citizen with saying the Pledge? Will they also be allowed to stand by their beliefs?

Under a new Wisconsin law, all public schools are to offer the Pledge or the national anthem every day. Although students are not to be “compelled” to do so, reality is far more complicated.

In my school, on Friday, Sept. 28, teachers were told to send a note home about the new state law. The daily routine was to begin the following Monday.

That Monday, a fourth-grader recited the Pledge over the school intercom. I watched the reactions of my students, who are in a combined second- and third-grade classroom. About half my students mumbled some of the words. Several had their hands on their hearts. Two Hmong girls merely smiled. One boy, Jeremy, was sitting cross-legged, head down, with the hood of his sweatshirt over his face. Ceci was the only one standing up. She was also saluting and after the pledge was over, she broke into a vibrant rendition of “God Bless America.”

WHAT DOES THE PLEDGE MEAN?

Watching my students, I wondered what the Pledge meant to them. Did they understand the words (even the fourth-grader had said, “one nation, invisible”)? Could they understand why some might choose not to say the Pledge? How could I protect the rights of those who don’t want to take part, while at the same time not let my beliefs interfere with students who want to participate?

I decided to approach these questions by holding a class discussion. I first asked my students what they thought the Pledge meant. Most echoed the thoughts of adults. They said it was about “respecting other people, respecting the world, world peace, and not fighting.” It was clear that the meaning they interpreted had little to do with the actual words.

I decided to move on to the next part of my lesson plan: defining the words used in the Pledge.

Ceci said that “Pledge” means “that I stand up for the flag” and “for the Army.” She added that it means to “be proud of yourself.” Jeremy said it meant “you gave loyalty to the flag.”

Ceci, meanwhile, defined “liberty” as, “All the people in the world are very special and should get the same things and be treated the same.” Justice was similarly defined as, “We’re going to give liberty to everyone in the whole entire world.”

None of the students understood the word “indivisible.” They thought they were supposed to say “invisible,” or “invincible.” I tried to clear up the confusion, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that overall, my students had little idea of what they were saying when they recited the Pledge.

Then I asked the class why they thought some people might choose to not participate in the Pledge. The answers that followed were insightful, I thought, for seven- and eight-year-olds. Some of their comments:

“‘They might not like the U.S.,” said Keema.

“They don’t think it’s true that one nation is under God,” offered Jeremy. “There’s more nations under God.”

“Maybe they don’t believe in God,” said Tyessa.

“They might be from a different country,” suggested Kelly, “And be forced to move here.”

“Or maybe the countries they’re from don’t do this. They’re not used to it,” added Emily.

I asked if people might disagree with the “liberty and justice for all” part.

“It’s not true that people are treated the same,” Ceci said.

“It’s not true that we have justice for all,” Jeremy noted. “How can we say that when we’re bombing right now? The people in Afghanistan aren’t getting liberty or justice. They’re just getting bombed!”

“No, my friend, Stephen, across the hall, he don’t believe in saying it. He says it’s white people’s crap,” Ceci said. “Now I’m not saying I agree or nothing,” she added quickly, “That’s what he says. My family says the Pledge.”

I asked the class to think about what Stephen might have meant, even if he used words deemed inappropriate in school. Ceci responded, “Some people can’t afford the money. They say your family can’t get a job.”

“Some people don’t want Black people to do what they want to do,” Tamara said. “They treated them like slaves. That’s not equal when white people treat Black people different.”

I told the students there would be a school board meeting that night to discuss different opinions about the Pledge (I teach in Madison where for a brief while the school board required only an instrumental version of the Star Spangled Banner; after public protest, it reverted to a policy that instructs each principal how to implement the state law through a daily recital of the Pledge of Allegiance or the singing of the National Anthem.)

One of the more insightful comments came from Ashle, who said: “We should just take a minute of silence to think about that crash stuff.”

Ceci reflected what many in the Madison community seemed to be thinking and said, “People who don’t like it can go out of the room. They can go in the closet and shut the door.”

Overall, I felt that our meeting was successful. Above all, students had been able to express their opinions about what the Pledge meant to them, and had analyzed why the Pledge might not mean the same thing to everyone.

Now, a full month after the daily Pledge was required, more children feel the peer pressure and join in. Jeremy, however, remains adamant in not saying the Pledge, and I have told him I support his right to do as he believes.

As I write, the sunlight streams through my classroom “flag,” a stained-glass rainbow sign. In the hallway, students’ peace posters decorate the lockers and doorways. I find such symbols of acceptance of diversity and world peace far more appealing than those of national pride. But these are strange times.

I feel for Jeremy and Caetano and all the other students who choose to not join in the Pledge. I hope the cheers and jeers of patriotic fervor will not silence their rights.

Kate Lyman teaches a combined second- and third-grade classroom in Madison, Wis. The names of the students have been changed.
The Supreme Court on The Pledge

The last time the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the Pledge of Allegiance was in 1943 in West Virginia State Board of Education vs. Barnette. In 1942, West Virginia’s State Board of Education mandated that the flag salute become “a regular part of the program of activities in the public schools.” Any student failing to comply could be charged with insubordination and expelled. For religious reasons, Walter Barnette, a Jehovah’s Witness, refused to allow his children to salute the flag and say the Pledge. In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor below and excerpts from the decision, which can be found at http://laws.findlaw.com/us/3196594.html.

To sustain the compulsory flag salute we are required to say that a Bill of Rights which guards the individual’s right to speak his own mind, left it open to public authorities to compel him to utter what is not in his mind. … Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good as well as by evil men.

As first and moderate methods to attain unity have failed, those bent on its accomplishment must resort to an ever-increasing severity. As governmental pressure to attain unity becomes greater, so strife becomes more bitter as to whether its unity shall be. Probably no deeper division of our people could proceed from any provocation than from finding it necessary to choose what doctrine and whose program public educational officials shall compel youth to unite in embracing. Ultimate futility of such attempts to compel coherence is the lesson of every such effort from the Roman drive to stamp out Christianity as a disturber of its pagan unity, the Inquisition, as a means to religious and dynastic unity, the Siberian exiles as a means to Russian unity, down to the fact that failing efforts of our present totalitarian enemies. Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters.

Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.

It seems trite but necessary to say that the First Amendment to our Constitution was designed to avoid these ends by avoiding the beginnings. We set up government by consent of the governed, and the Bill of Rights denies those in power any legal opportunity to coerce what the Constitution forbids. To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous instead of compulsory need not matter much. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ with things as to that touch of the heart’s existing order. If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.

We think the action of the local authorities in compelling the flag salute and pledge transcends constitutional limitations on their power and invades the sphere of intellect and spirit which it is the purpose of the First Amendment to our Constitution to reserve from all official control.

Teaching Ideas

In your own words, summarize why the Supreme Court found that no one could be compelled to salute the flag or say the Pledge of Allegiance.

Choose several quotes and write your reactions. This is an argument, agreement, argument, questions, or other observations.

What is the relationship between patriotism and saying the Pledge? Novelist Barbara Kingsolver wrote after Sept. 11 that, “Patriotism seems to be falling to whoever claims it loudest.” Have students write definitions of patriotism. Ask them to give examples of “patriotism in action.”

An Alternative to War

Put forth a legitimate self-defense claim, it is still to the UN Security Council where they ought to turn. Even in cases of self-defense, and particularly when there is sufficient time — weeks have passed. We could, if President Bush says we are in for a “lengthy” battle — turning to the Security Council may be required. It is certainly better policy and more in keeping with the UN Charter to do so.

2. The UN Security Council has the authority and the responsibility at all times “to take any actions as it deems necessary for the restoration of international peace and security.” Article 51.

The Security Council can establish an international tribunal to try those suspected of involvement in the Sept. 11 attacks as it did with regard to Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and request the extradition of suspects. It could apply sanctions to countries that refuse to comply as it did successfully against Libya — a strategy that resulted in the trials in Scotland. It can establish a UN force to enforce arrests, prevent attacks or to counter aggression. Articles 41-50. Measures the Security Council can employ include interruptions of economic relations, naval air, postal, telegraphic, radio communications and severance of diplomatic relations. Article 41. It could apply sanctions to banks that refuse to cooperate in a freeze on the assets of suspects.

As a policy matter, all of these alternatives seem superior to that currently contemplated by the U.S. — the unilateral use of force against targets in Afghanistan and other countries. The UN may well offer a peaceful means of bringing the perpetrators of justice to justice, and will make the fight against terrorism more worldwide responsibility and will hopefully lessen the resentment that unilateral U.S. action frequently entails.

In light of these principles these are the actions the U.S. should immediately undertake:

2. Request the establishment of an international tribunal with authority to seek out, extradite or arrest and try those responsible for the Sept. 11 attack and those who commit or are conspiring to commit future attacks.
3. Establish an international military or police force under the control of the UN and which can effectuate the arrest of those responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks and those who commit or are conspiring to commit future attacks. It is crucial that such force should be under control of the UN and not a mere fig leaf for the United States as was the case in the war against Iraq.
4. We are hopeful that the children of other countries will offer a way out of the violent course our nation is currently embarked upon. We see little risk in taking the steps we have outlined. We see great danger in ignoring the process that provides a path away from violence and toward peace.

History of the Pledge

The pledge was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s first voyage to the Americas. President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed Oct. 21st — the original Columbus Day — a national holiday, and designated the day as the national observance of the Pledge. The pledge was added during the Eisenhower administration in 1954 at the height of anti-communist hysteria. The original “Pledge to the Flag” was included in “The Official Program for the National Columbus Public Celebration of October 21, 1952.” That day, with increasing numbers of eastern and southern European immigrants entering the United States, an estimated 10 million children first learned the pledge.

Children were instructed to stand hands to the side, to face the flag, and then to give the flag a military salute with “right hand lifted, palm downward, in a line with the forehead and close to it.”

Standing thus, the Official Program tells students to “all repeat together, slowly. ‘I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.’ At the words, ‘to my Flag,’ the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, towards the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side.”

Students were then to declare: “One Country! One Flag! One Pledge!” Or, presumably, the “One Language!” was English.

The arm-ended flag salute was the norm in America until the Civil War, when the similarity with the Confederate flag became uncomfortable. The hand-over-heart salute was then introduced.

The words “under God” do not appear in the original pledge. They were added during the Eisenhower administration in 1954 at the height of anti-communist hysteria.

History of the Pledge

The article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11

Teaching Ideas

Divide students into small groups. Ask students to imagine that they are responsible for bringing to justice the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attacks. Their one requirement is that they must obey international law. Each group should devise a detailed plan.

Based on the information in this article, what principles should devise a detailed plan.

What is the relationship between patriotism and saying the Pledge? Novelist Barbara Kingsolver wrote after Sept. 11 that, “Patriotism seems to be falling to whoever claims it loudest.” Have students write definitions of patriotism. Ask them to give examples of “patriotism in action.”

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Bush Signs Anti-Terrorism Law
Will USA Patriot Act foster harassment of legitimate political dissent?

President Bush signed a new “anti-terrorism” law Oct. 26 that grants law enforcement authorities sweeping new surveillance powers that are not limited to terrorism investigations but also apply to criminal and intelligence investigations and to investigating instances of political dissent. The American Civil Liberties Union’s website includes fact sheets on various aspects of the new terrorism law, including the one printed below on the Anti-Terrorism Law and the Right to Dissent. For more information go to: www.aclu.org/crime/anti-terrorism.htm.

BY THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Section 802 of the final version of the anti-terrorism legislation, the Unitigening America By Providing Appropriate Tools Required To Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (H.R. 3162, the “USA PATRIOT Act”) creates a broadly defined new crime of domestic terrorism. We oppose this definition of terrorism because it is unnecessary and could be used to prosecute dissidents. Under federal law there are already three definitions of terrorism — international terrorism, terrorism transcending national borders, and federal terrorism. The Sept. 11 attacks violated all three of these laws.

Under Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act, a person commits the crime of domestic terrorism if within the U.S. they engage in activity that involves acts dangerous to human life that violate the laws of the United States or any state and appear to be intended: (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.

The Administration has not adequately explained why this new crime should be created or why the definitions in existing anti-terrorism laws are insufficient. This overbroad terrorism definition would sweep in people who engage in acts of political protest if those acts were dangerous to human life.

People associated with organizations such as Operation Rescue and the Earth Liberation Front, and the World Trade Organization protesters, have engaged in activities that could subject them to prosecution as terrorists.

Under the USA PATRIOT Act, once the government decides that conduct is “domestic terrorism,” law enforcement agents have the authority to charge anyone who is providing assistance to that person, even if the assistance is an act as minor as “domestic terrorism.”

The ACLU does not oppose the criminal prosecution of people who commit acts of civil disobedience if those acts result in property damage or place people in danger. That type of behavior is already illegal and perpetrators of these crimes can be prosecuted and subjected to serious penalties. However, such crimes often are not “terrorism.”

The legislative response to terrorism should not turn ordinary citizens into terrorists. In addition, this provision gives the federal government the authority to prosecute violations of state law, which should be prosecuted in state courts, not in federal court.

Additional Factsheets
The ACLU website has update factsheets on how the new anti-terrorism law:
- Expands Law Enforcement “Sneak and Peak” Warrants
- Puts Student Privacy at Risk
- Enables Law Enforcement to Use Intelligence Authorities to Circumvent the Privacy Protections Afforded in Criminal Cases
- Puts the CIA Back in the Business of Spying on Americans

Teaching Ideas
Divide students into nine different research groups and have them read the portion of the law referred to in the ACLU factsheet/critique, along with the factsheet itself. Perhaps students could also locate one or two additional sources.

Each group should be responsible for teaching the rest of the class about its portion of the bill, and raising critical questions for discussion. Teachers might also encourage students to come up with a number of hypothetical situations to exemplify how the law could play out in practice. Or teachers might write up some situations of their own and have students apply the law.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11

Bush Initiatives Threaten Basic Rights

Following are recent federal initiatives that present a long-term threat to democracy and to civil liberties in the United States. These moves are in addition to the USA Patriot Act (see article this page), which vastly expands government surveillance powers.

- President Bush issued an executive order Nov. 13 allowing special military tribunals to try non-citizens whom the government has “reason to believe” are connected to terrorism. The tribunals would even apply to non-citizens in the United States, including lawful permanent residents. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, it is unprecedented to establish such military tribunals when Congress has not declared war.

  The tribunals would severely limit the rights of a defendant. For example, the tribunals will not call for proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and will allow hearsay and evidence deemed illegally obtained in civilian courts. The tribunals can take place in secret, and can also take place outside the United States, even on ships. According to conservative columnist William Safire in the Nov. 15 New York Times, “His [Bush’s] kangaroo court can conceal evidence by citing national security, make up its own rules, find a defendant guilty even if a third of the officers disagree, and execute the alien with no review by any civilian court.” Bush alone will be able to decide who can be tried before the tribunals.

- The U.S. Bureau of Prisons issued a regulation on Oct. 31 allowing the government to listen in on conversations between prison inmates and their lawyers and legal counsel whenever the Attorney General believes there is “reasonable suspicion” that the conversation is connected to “terrorist activity.”

  The Justice Department issued a Nov. 9 memo outlining an unprecedented plan to interview foreigners in this country legally. The plan calls for interrogations of some 5,000 men aged 18 to 33 who entered the United States on non-immigrant visas since Jan. 1. Because those interviewed will largely be from Middle Eastern countries, the move has raised fears of intensified racial and ethnic profiling.

  The Bush administration continues to hold an unidentified number of the approximately 1,200 people detained shortly after Sept. 11 on immigration violations as “material witnesses.” Their identities have not been revealed, nor have the charges against them. As of mid-November, FBI director Robert Mueller III had refused to grant those detained access to lawyers or family members. He would not even disclose where they are being held.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11
House “Stimulus” Money Grab

The 16 low-tax companies that would get more than $100 million each under the GOP-backed bill include five in the energy business, along with the three largest U.S. automakers. Two companies are in the airline industry, which is receiving $15 billion in grants and loans under already passed legislation.

The bill’s proposed total of $25 billion in instant rebates for profitable tax-avoiding corporations is almost twice as big as the $13.7 billion in added individual rebates that the tax committee decided to provide to $37 million, mostly low-income families and whose 2000 earnings were too low to qualify for the previous round of personal tax rebates.

Under the bill, the AMT would be repealed (to facilitate future tax sheltering) and corporations would be entitled to an immediate rebate of any alternative minimum tax paid since the tax was established in 1986. In contrast, under current law, a company that pays the AMT can get a refund in a later year only if its regular income tax payments exceed the AMT that year. Many profitable companies have so many loopholes that they never pay enough in regular income taxes to use these “AMT credit carry forwards.”

For more information from Citizens for Tax Justice go to www.ctj.org.

Corporate Profiteering Following is a list of 16 corporations and the amount of their rebate under the House “economic stimulus” bill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Rebate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>$1.4 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford Motor Co.</td>
<td>$1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>$833 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Electric</td>
<td>$671 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TXU (Texas Utilities Co.)</td>
<td>$608 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DaimlerChrysler</td>
<td>$600 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChevronTexaco</td>
<td>$572 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAL (United Airlines)</td>
<td>$371 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enron</td>
<td>$254 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips Petroleum</td>
<td>$241 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMR (American Airlines)</td>
<td>$184 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMC Global</td>
<td>$155 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condisco</td>
<td>$144 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Energy</td>
<td>$136 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westvaco</td>
<td>$112 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knuei</td>
<td>$102 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Citizens for Tax Justice

Teaching Ideas

Ask students to make a list of all the groups of Americans hurt by the Sept. 11 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Ask: Which of these groups will benefit by the “stimulus” tax-cut bill? Which will not?

Divide the class into pairs. Assign to each group one or two of the 16 corporations that will receive at least $100 million in tax rebates. Working on the internet, each pair should research and write up a brief profile of its corporation, including net profit in 2000 and salary of top executives (if available). What is a rationale for why this company would deserve a rebate of over $100 million? What is a reason why this company does not deserve such a rebate?

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11

Attacks on Muslims and Arab-Americans

Following is a sampling of the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim backlash that surfaced following the Sept. 11 tragedy. The list actually understates the number of threats and attacks, because it does not include crimes against Indian-Americans, Sikhs, and South-Asian-Americans.

The list was compiled by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

• Sept. 11, Chicago, IL: Three hundred people shout-
ing anti-Arab insults were turned back by police as they attempted to march toward a mosque southwest of the city. (Chicago Tribune, Sept. 13.)

• Sept. 12, Gary, IN: A Yemeni-American gas station owner survived an attack by a gunman who opened fire directly and fired more than 21 shots from a high-powered assault rifle. The owner was protected by one-inch thick glass. (The TimesOnline.com, Sept. 13.)

• Sept. 12, Atlanta, GA: Four men attempted to stab a Sudanese man, telling him, “You killed our people in New York.” (Atlanta Journal Constitution, Sept. 13.)

• Sept. 14, Tulsa, OK: Police investigated an attack on an Arab American who was beaten while leaving his apartment. Three people jumped on him, knocked him down, covered his eyes and beat him. After addressing him with an expletive, the men threatened, “We are going to cut you like you cut our people.” (Tulsa World, Sept. 15.)

• Sept. 17, Moundsville, PA: A man with a knife attacked a female high school student of Middle Eastern descent, yelling at her, “You’re not an American. You don’t belong here.” (Associated Press, Sept. 25.)

• Sept. 18, Palmdale, CA: A note sent to a public high school said the World Trade Center attacks would be avenged in a “massacre” of Muslims, with the names of five students listed beneath. (Associated Press, Sept. 20.)

We and They

BY LUCILLE CLIFTON

Boris and Yuki and Sarah and Sue
and Karl and Latanya, Maria too
dreamed of the world
and it was spinning
and all the people
just talked about winning
the wind was burning
the water was churning
the trees were bending

Something was ending
and all the talk was “we” and “they”
the children all hugged themselves
waiting for the day
when the night of the long bad dream
is done
and the family of humans
are one
and being and winning are not the same
and “we” and “they” is just a game
and the wind is a friend that doesn’t fuss
and every They is actually Us.

Michigan store clerk and Lebanese native Ramzi Chammout says he fears the violence of Mideast has come to the United States.

• Sept. 19, Lincoln Park, ME: Ali Al Mansouri, originally from Yemen, was shot 12 times in the back while fleeing from his attacker. The victim was asleep when his attacker broke in, dragged him out of bed and, according to his own police confession and his girlfriend’s statements, threatened, “I’m going to kill you for what happened in New York and D.C.” (WDIV Detroit, Sept. 21.)

If you are aware of any incidents or hate crimes, contact the ADC Legal Department at 1-202-444-3990, or send email to legal@adc.org.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for students.
New World Disorder

The questions must be asked: Does Infinite Justice for some mean Infinite Injustice for others?

BY ARUNDHATI ROY

EW DELHI — Nothing can excuse or justify an act of terrorism, whether it is committed by religious fundamentalists, private militia, people’s resistance movements — or whether it’s dressed up as a war of retribution by a recognized government.

The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington. It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world. Each innocent person that is killed must be added to, not set off against, the gristy tally of civilians who died in New York and Washington.

When he announced the air strikes, President George W. Bush said, “We’re a peaceful nation.” America’s favorite ambassador, Tony Blair (who also holds the portfolio of British prime minister), echoed him: “We’re a peaceful people.” So now we know. Pigs are horses. Girls are boys. War is peace.

Here is a partial list of the countries that America has been at war with — overtly and covertly — since World War II: China, Korea, Guatemala, Indonesia, Cuba, the Belgian Congo, Peru, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Sudan, Yugoslavia. And now Afghanistan.

Certainly it does not tire — this, the most free nation in the world. What freedoms does it uphold? Within its borders, the freedom of speech, religion, thought, of artistic expression, food habits, sexual preferences (well, to some extent), and many other exemplary, wonderful things. Outside its borders, the freedom to dominate, humiliate and subjugate—usually in the service of America’s real religion, the “free market.” So when the U.S. government christens a war “Operation Infinite Justice,” or “Operation Enduring Freedom,” we in the Third World feel more than a tremor of fear. Because we know that Infinite Justice for some means Infinite Injustice for others. And Enduring Freedom for some means Enduring Subjugation for others.

The International Coalition Against Terror is largely a cabal of the richest countries in the world. Between them, they manufacture and sell almost all of the world’s weapons, and they possess the largest stockpile of weapons of mass destruction — chemical, biological, and nuclear. They have fought the most wars, account for most of the genocide, subjection, ethnic cleansing, and human rights violations in modern history, and have sponsored, armed, and financed untold numbers of dictators and despots. Between them, they have worshiped, almost defiled, the cult of violence and war. For all its appalling sins, the Taliban just isn’t in the same league.

The Taliban was compounded in the crumbling crukible of rubble, heroin and land mines in the backwash of the Cold War. Its oldest leaders are in their early for- tis. Many of them are disfigured and handicapped, missing an eye, an arm or a leg. They grew up in a society scarred and devastated by war. Between the Soviet Union and America, over 20 years, about $50 billion worth of arms and ammunition was poured into Afghanistan. The latest weaponry was the only shared of modernity to intrude upon a thoroughly medieval society.

More than a million Afghan people lost their lives in the 20 years of conflict that preceded this new war. Afghanistan was reduced to rubble, and now, the ruble is being pounded into finer dust.

Put your ear to the ground in this part of the world, and you can hear the thrumming, the deadly drumbeat of burgeoning anger. Please. Please, stop the war now. Enough people have died. The smart missiles are just not smart enough. They’re blowing up whole ware-houses of suppressed fury.

Arundhati Roy is the author of The God of Small Things, for which she received the Booker Prize, and The Cost of Living. Her latest book of essays, Power Politics, has just been published by South End Press.

This article originally appeared in The Guardian newspaper in Britain on Oct. 23. A complete copy of the text is available at www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4283081,00.html. Reprinted with permission.

Teaching Ideas

Arundhati Roy suggests that the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan is an act of terrorism. What is the definition of terrorism that Roy appears to be using? Is this your definition? How might this definition differ from that of George W. Bush?

Roy’s language is richly metaphorical. For example, she writes, “Put your ear to the ground in this part of the world, and you can hear the thrumming, the deadly drumbeat of burgeoning anger,” and “The smart missiles are just not smart enough. They’re blowing up whole warehouses of suppressed fury.” Ask students to brainstorm metaphors that capture their understandings of the aftermath of Sept. 11. Students can make metaphorical drawings or use the metaphors as the basis for poems.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11

Where Does the Violence Come From?

BY RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

The people who did this attack [on Sept. 11] are a real threat to the human race. The perpetrators deserve to be punished, and I personally would be happy if all the people involved in this act were to be imprisoned for the rest of their lives. But that is killing must be added to, not set off against, the gristy tally of civilians who died in New York and Washington.

The narrow focus on the perpetrators allows us to avoid dealing with the underlying issues. When violence becomes so prevalent throughout the planet, it’s too easy to simply talk of “deranged minds.” We need to ask ourselves, “What is it in the way that we are living, organizing our societies, and treating each other that makes violence seem plausible to so many people?” And why is it that our immediate response to violence is to use violence ourselves — thus reinforcing the cycle of violence in the world?

We in the spiritual world will see the root problem here as a growing global incapacity to recognize the spirit of God in each other — what we call the sanctity of each human being. But even if you reject religious language, you can see that the willingness of people to hurt each other to advance their own interests has become a global problem, and it’s only the dramatic level of this particular attack which distinguishes it from the violence and inhumanity to each other that is part of our daily lives.

We live in one world, increasingly interconnected with everyone, and the forces that lead people to feel outrage, anger and desperation eventually impact on our own daily lives.

If the U.S. turns its back on global agreements to preserve the environment, unilaterally cancels its treaties to not build a missile defense, accelerates the processes by which a global economy has made some people in the third world richer but many poorer, shows that it cares nothing for the fate of refugees who have been homeless for decades, and otherwise turns its back on ethical norms, it becomes far easier for the haters and the fundamentalists to recruit people who are willing to kill themselves in strikes against what they perceive to be an evil American empire represented by the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. Most Americans will feel puzzled by any reference to this “larger picture.” It seems baffling to imagine that somehow we are part of a world system which is slowly destroying the life sup- continued on page 19
By George Monbiot

If any government sponsors the outrights and killers of innocents,” George Bush announced on the day he began bombing Afghanistan, “they have become outrights and murderers themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril.

I’m glad he said “any government” as there’s one which, though it has yet to be identified as a sponsor of terrorism, requires his urgent attention. For the past 55 years a terrorist training camp, whose victims massively outnumber the people killed by the attack on New York, the Embassy bombings, and the other atrocities laid, rightly or wrongly, at Al Qaeda’s door.

The camp is called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, or Whisc. It is based in Fort Benning, GA, and it is funded by Mr. Bush’s government.

Until January this year, Whisc was called the “School of the Americas” or SOA. Since 1946, SOA has trained more than 60,000 Latin-American soldiers and policemen. Among its graduates are many of the continent’s most notorious torturers, mass murderers, dictators, and state terrorists. As hundreds of pages of documentation compiled by the pressure group SOA Watch show, Latin America has been ripped apart by its alumni.

In June this year, Colonel Byron Lima Estrada, once a student at the school, was convicted in Guatemala City of murdering Bishop Juan Gerardi in 1998. Gerardi was killed because he had helped to write a report on the atrocities committed by Guatemala’s D-2, the military intelligence agency run by Lima Estrada with the help of two other SOA graduates. D-2 coordinated the “anti-insurgency” campaign which obliterated 448 Mayan Indian villages, and murdered tens of thousands of their people. Forty percent of the cabinet ministers who served the genocidal regimes of Lucas Garcia, Ross Montt and Mejia Victores studied at the School of the Americas.

In 1993, the United Nations truth commission on El Salvador named the army officers who had committed the worst atrocities of the civil war. Two-thirds of them had been trained at the School of the Americas. Among them were Roberto D’Aubuisson, the leader of El Salvador’s death squads; the men who killed Archbishop Oscar Romero; and 19 of the 26 soldiers who murdered the Jesuit priests in 1989. In Chile, the school’s graduates ran both Augusto Pinochet’s secret police and his three principal concentration camps. One of them helped to murder Orlando Letelier and Bettina Wulff in Washington DC in 1976. Argentina’s dictator Roberto Viola and Leopoldo Galtieri, Panama’s Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos, Peru’s Juan Velasco Alvarado and Ecuador’s Guillermo Rodriguez all benefited from the school’s instruction. So did the leader of the Grupo Colina death squad in Puigemont’s Peru; four of the five officers who ran the infamous Battalion 3-16 in Honduras (which controlled the death squads there in the 1980s), and the commander responsible for the 1994 Oroceno massacre in Mexico.

As the soil of the Americas is not only the continent’s most notorious mass murderers, it is also the site of the school that has trained more than 60,000 Latin-American soldiers and policemen. Among them were Roberto D’Aubuisson, the leader of El Salvador’s death squads; the men who killed Archbishop Oscar Romero; and 19 of the 26 soldiers who murdered the Jesuit priests in 1989. In Chile, the school’s graduates ran both Augusto Pinochet’s secret police and his three principal concentration camps. One of them helped to murder Orlando Letelier and Bettina Wulff in Washington DC in 1976. Argentina’s dictator Roberto Viola and Leopoldo Galtieri, Panama’s Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos, Peru’s Juan Velasco Alvarado and Ecuador’s Guillermo Rodriguez all benefited from the school’s instruction. So did the leader of the Grupo Colina death squad in Puigemont’s Peru; four of the five officers who ran the infamous Battalion 3-16 in Honduras (which controlled the death squads there in the 1980s), and the commander responsible for the 1994 Oroceno massacre in Mexico.

All this, the school’s defenders insist, is ancient history. But SOA graduates are also involved in the dirty war now being waged, with US support, in Colombia. In 1999 the US State Department’s report on human rights named two SOA graduates as the murderers of the peace commissioner, Alex Lopez. Last year, Human Rights Watch revealed that seven former pupils are running paramilitary groups there and have commissioned kidnappings, disappearances, murders, and massacres. In February this year an SOA graduate in Colombia was convicted of complicity in the torture and killing of 30 peasants by paramilitaries. The school is now drawing more of its students from Colombia than from any other country.

The FBI defines terrorism as “violent acts... intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government, or affect the conduct of a government,” which is a precise description of the activities of SOA’s graduates. But how can we be sure that their alma mater has had any part in this? Well, in 1996, the US government was forced to release seven of the school’s training manuals. Among other tips for terrorists, they recommended blackmail, torture, execution, and the arrest of witnesses’ relatives.

Last year, partly as a result of the campaign run by SOA Watch, several US congressmen tried to shut the school down. They were defeated by 10 votes. Instead, the House of Representatives voted to close it and then immediately reopened it under a different name.

We can’t expect this terrorist training camp to reform itself; after all, it refuses even to acknowledge that it has a past, let alone to learn from it. What should we do about the “evil-doers” in Fort Benning, GA?

George Monbiot is a weekly columnist for The Guardian and author of Captive State: the corporate takeover of Britain. The above is condensed from the Oct. 30th Guardian. A complete text of the article is available at www.monbiot.com. Reprinted with permission of author and The Guardian. (George Monbiot)

Teaching Ideas

George Monbiot chooses his article with the question, “What should we do about the ‘evil-doers’ in Fort Benning, GA?” Ask students how they would answer that question.

Also ask students to compare the evidence linking the School of the Americas to terrorist atrocities to evidence linking Al Qaeda training camps to the attack on New York. Have students list the evidence against the former School of the Americas in one column and list evidence against Al Qaeda in another. Which evidence is stronger?

Watch the award-winning video, School of the Assassins, available at http://www.soaw.org/resources.html#videos.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.celtlinkingshools.org/sept11

Where Does the Violence Come From?

Continued from page 18

port system of the planet, and quickly transferring the wealth of the world into our own pockets.

We don’t feel personally responsible when an American corporation runs a sweatshop in the Philippines or crushes efforts of workers to organize in Singapore. We don’t see ourselves implicated when the US refuses to consider the plight of Pales-

Stanian refugees or uses the excuse of fighting drugs to support repression in Colombia or other parts of Central America. We don’t even see the symbolism when terrorists attack America’s military center and our trade center—we talk of them as buildings, though others see them as centers of the forces that are causing the world so much pain.

We have narrowed our own attention to “getting through” or “doing well” in our own personal lives, and who has time to focus on all the rest of this? Most of us are leading perfectly reasonable lives within the options that we have available to us—so why should others be angry at us, much less strike out against us? And the truth is, our anger is also understandable.

Yet our acts of counter-terrorism will be counter-productive. We should have learned from the current phase of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle: responding to terror with more violence, rather than asking ourselves what we could do to change the conditions that generated it in the first place, will only ensure more violence against us in the future.

This is a world out of touch with itself, filled with people who have forgotten how to recognize and respond to the sacred in each other because we are so used to looking at others from the standpoint of what we can do for us. The alternatives are stark, either start caring about the fate of everyone on this planet or be prepared for a slippery slope toward violence that will eventually dominate our daily lives.
The Geopolitics of War

The current war against terrorism is firmly rooted in geopolitical issues. Oil and Saudi Arabia are the true center of the conflict.

BY MICHAEL T. KLAIRE

There are many ways to view the conflict between the United States and Osama bin Laden’s terror network: as a contest between Western liberalism and Eastern fanaticism, as suggested by many pundits in the United States; as a struggle between the defenders and the enemies of authentic Islam, as suggested by many in the Muslim world; and as a predictable backlash against American villainy abroad, as suggested by some on the left. But while useful in assessing some dimensions of the conflict, these cultural and political analyses obscure a fundamental reality: that this war, like most of the wars that preceded it, is firmly rooted in geopolitical competition.

The geopolitical dimensions of the war are somewhat hard to discern because the initial fighting is taking place in Afghanistan, and because our principal adversary, bin Laden, has no apparent interest in material concerns. But this is deceptive, because the true center of the conflict is Saudi Arabia, not Afghanistan (or Palestine), and because bin Laden’s ultimate objectives include the imposition of a new Saudi government, which in turn would control the single most valuable geopolitical prize on the face of the earth: Saudi Arabia’s vast oil deposits, representing one-fourth of the world’s known petroleum reserves.

To fully appreciate the roots of the current conflict, it is necessary to travel back in time—specifically, to the final years of World War II, when the U.S. government began to formulate plans for the world it would dominate in the postwar era. As the war drew to a close, the State Department was enjoined by President Roosevelt to devise the policies and institutions that would guarantee U.S. security and prosperity in the coming epoch. This entailed the design and formation of the United Nations, the construction of the Bretton Woods world financial institutions and, most significantly in the current context, the procurement of adequate oil supplies.

American strategists considered access to oil to be especially important because it was an essential factor in the Allied victory over the Axis powers. Although the nuclear strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war, it was oil that fueled the armies that brought Germany and Japan to their knees. Oil powered the vast numbers of ships, tanks, and aircraft that endowed Allied forces with a decisive edge over their adversaries, which lacked access to reliable sources of petroleum. It was widely assumed, therefore, that access to large supplies of oil would be critical to U.S. success in any future conflicts.

OIL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Where would this oil come from? During World Wars I and II, the United States was able to obtain sufficient oil for its own and its allies’ needs from deposits in the American South and from Mexico and Venezuela. But most U.S. analysts believed that these supplies would be insufficient to meet American and European requirements in the postwar era. As a result, the State Department initiated an intensive study to identify other sources of petroleum. This effort, led by the department’s economic advisor, Herbert Feis, concluded that only one location could provide the needed petroleum. “In all surveys of the situation,” Feis noted (in a statement quoted by Daniel Yergin in The Prize), “the pencil came to an awed pause at one point and place — the Middle East.”

To be more specific, Feis and his associates concluded that the world’s most prolific supply of untapped oil was to be found in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. But how to get to this oil? At first, the State Department proposed the formation of a government-owned oil firm to acquire concessions in Saudi Arabia and extract the kingdom’s reserves. This plan was considered too unwieldy, however, and instead U.S. officials turned this task over to the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), an alliance of major U.S. oil corporations. But these officials were also worried about the kingdom’s long-term stability, so they concluded that the United States would have to assume responsibility for the defense of Saudi Arabia. In one of the most extraordinary occurrences in modern American history, President Roosevelt met with King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi regime, on a U.S. warship in the Suez Canal following the February 1945 conference in Yalta. Although details of the meeting have never been made public, it is widely believed that Roosevelt gave the King a promise of U.S. protection in return for privileged American access to Saudi oil—an arrangement that remains in full effect today and constitutes the essential core of the United States-Saudi relationship.

This relationship has provided enormous benefits to both sides. The United States has enjoyed preferred access to Saudi petroleum reserves, obtaining about one-sixth of its crude-oil imports from the kingdom. ARAMCO and its U.S. partners have reaped immense profits from their operations in Saudi Arabia and from the distribution of Saudi oil worldwide. (Although ARAMCO’s Saudi holdings were nationalized by the Saudi government in 1976, the company continues to manage Saudi oil production and to market its petroleum products abroad.) Saudi Arabia also buys about $6-10 billion worth of goods per year from U.S. companies. The Saudi royal family, for its part, has become immensely wealthy and, because of continued U.S. protection, has remained safe from external and internal attack.

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Teaching Ideas

Michael Klare asserts that the “true center of the conflict in Saudi Arabia.” What evidence does he offer to support this claim? Klare writes that the “special” relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia “has provided enormous benefits to both sides.” Who has benefited from the relationship? Who has not benefited? How has the gap between the rich and poor in Saudi Arabia contributed to resentment toward the United States and the regime it supports in the Middle East? Ask students to investigate the energy connections of the Bush administration. Might these connections influence U.S. foreign policy? How has oil influenced previous U.S. foreign policy?

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sep11
How Many Must Die?

An estimated 1 million people, more than half of them children, have died as a result of the sanctions against Iraq.

BY GEORGE CAPACCIO

I

t was a winter’s day, and I stood in an unheated room in a hospital in the ancient city of Mosul, Iraq. I was surrounded by children afflicted with a blood disease known as septicaemia. I turned to our guide, a member of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, and asked him about the prognosis for the children. Normally a calm, restrained man, he turned toward me with a look I had not seen on his face before.

“Me, George,” he said, “sometimes you know because of the shortage of medicines, they are all of them going to be dead.”

Then he turned away. At that moment, one of the doctors, a young woman, began to cry. Her colleague confided in English to me: “We have the skills, the training and all we can do is provide supportive care. Please understand, sometimes it is more than we can bear.”

I offered a teddy bear to a little boy nearby. His mother was standing between him and his brother. Both were dying from septicaemia. Two other children from the same family had already died from this disease. The woman took the toy from her son’s hands and returned it to me.

“I don’t want toys,” she said in anger. “We want medicine.”

As a delegate with various humanitarian organizations, I visited Iraq several times in 1990 and 1991. Sanctions were first imposed by the United Nations, under the leadership of the United States, in August 1990 following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. They will continue until Iraq concedes to a list of conditions, including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and ongoing UN monitoring of its weapons capability.

While nominally targeted at the government of Saddam Hussein, the sanctions have imposed conditions of life calculated to maximize suffering for the majority of Iraq’s citizens. In this regard, sanctions have been stunningly successful.

UNNECESSARY DEATHS

According to the UN, more than 1 million people — including more than 500,000 children below the age of five — have died in Iraq as a result of scarcity of food and medicine. Furthermore, 3 percent of Iraqi children under five are chronically malnourished. Almost one-quarter are considered overweight, twice as high as the levels in neighboring Jordan or Turkey, according to a 1997 UNICEF report.

Every day an estimated 250 people die as a result of health problems related to the sanctions. Children under age five, who account for almost half of such deaths, are dying mainly due to diarrhea, pneumonia, and malnutrition.

Prior to sanctions, health care in Iraq was free and first-rate. Now the public hospitals lack even adequate sanitation and are forced to charge patients for most services. Furthermore, the sanctions include an “intellectual boycott,” which cuts Iraqis off from international medical and scientific advances.

The economy, meanwhile, is in shambles, and the GDP per capita has plummeted. Public rationing has been instituted, but food is in short supply and the rations do not provide sufficient minerals, vitamins, or nutrients.

The devastation of the sanctions follows massive destruction as a result of the 1991 Gulf War, in which the U.S. and its allies carried out more than 100,000 bombing missions against Iraq in a six-week period. An estimated 88,000 tons of bombs were dropped — equivalent to seven Hiroshima-type atomic bombs. Because of the bombing and the sanctions, water and sewage treatment plants operate at a critically reduced capacity. Waterborne diseases such as typhoid fever are common.

How Many Must Die?
The above was condensed from an Oct. 24 article in The Guardian newspaper in Britain. Reprinted by permission of the author and The Guardian. © Andy Rowell. For the complete text, go to www.guardian.co.uk.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11

Afghanistan: The Route to Riches

BY ANDY ROWELL

A

s the war in Afghanistan unfolds, there is frantic diplomatic activity to ensure that any post-Taliban government will be both democratic and pro-West. Hidden in this explosive geo-political equation is the sensitive issue of securing control and export of the region’s vast oil and gas reserves. The Soviet estimated Afghanistan’s proven and probable natural gas reserves at 5 trillion cubic feet — enough for the United Kingdom’s requirement for two years — but this remains largely untapped because of the country’s civil war and poor pipeline infrastructure.

More importantly, according to the U.S. government, “Afghanistan’s significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from central Asia to the Arabian Sea.”

The Caspian Sea, the Caspian and Central Asian region, one of the world’s last great frontiers for the oil industry due to its tremendous untapped reserves. The U.S. government believes that total oil reserves could be 270 billion barrels. Total gas reserves could be 576 trillion cubic feet.

The presence of these oil reserves and the possibility of their export raises new strategic concerns for the U.S. and other Western industrial powers. “As oil companies build oil pipelines from the Caucasus and central Asia to supply Japan and the West, these strategic concerns gain military implications,” argued an article in the Military Review, the journal of the U.S. Army, earlier in the year.

Host governments and Western oil companies have been rushing to get in on the act. At least as late as 1995, it was believed, could be $7/hbillion from offshore oil and gas fields over the next 40 years. Both American and British oil companies have struck black gold. In April 1993, Chevron concluded a $20 billion joint venture to develop the Tengiz oilfield, with 6 to 9 billion barrels of estimated oil reserves in Kazakhstan alone. The following year, in what was described as “the deal of the century,” AIOC, a British Petroleum, signed an $8 billion agreement to develop Iraq’s Tengiz oil field, with 6 to 9 billion barrels of estimated oil reserves in Kazakhstan alone. The following year, in what was described as “the deal of the century,” AIOC, an international consortium of companies led by British Petroleum, signed an $8 billion agreement to develop Iraq’s Tengiz oilfield, with 6 to 9 billion barrels of estimated oil reserves in Kazakhstan alone.

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The Palestinian Uprising: A Primer

BY THE MIDDLE EAST RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PROJECT

At the start of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire ruled much of the Arab world, including the territory that is now Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. With the Allied victory in World War I, the area came under the control of the British who made contradictory promises to Arab and Zionist leaders about how — and by whom — the Mandate of Palestine was to be governed. At the time, 90 percent of the population was Arab; the Jewish community included long-time residents and new immigrants fleeing persecution in Russia and, later, other parts of Europe. A three-year uprising in the late 1930s against British rule and increased Jewish immigration resulted in a British proposal to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. UN General Assembly Resolution 181 reaffirmed partition in 1947. The war that followed led to the establishment of the State of Israel. Beyond the UN resolution, the creation of Israel also reflected newly widespread support for an independent Jewish state among European and American Jews as well as powerful Western governments, in response to the Nazi Holocaust.

Gaza came under the control of Egypt, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem under Jordanian control. Less than 20 years later, in the June 1967 war, Israel gained control of the rest of the former mandate of Palestine (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in 1980), the Egyptian Sinai (since returned to Egypt), and the Syrian Golan Heights. UN Security Council Resolution 242 (November 22, 1967), still not implemented, affirmed “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and called upon Israel to withdraw “from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”

The 1970s and 1980s saw Arab-Israeli wars in 1973 and 1982, the 1978 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in December 1987, and Yasser Arafat’s condemnation of terrorism and recognition of the state of Israel in December 1988.

The Madrid peace conference followed the Gulf war in October 1990. A year later, secret Israeli-Palestinian talks began in Oslo, Norway, culminating in the September 1993 Declaration of Principles (DoP) on interim Palestinian self-government, signed by Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The DoP set out a process for transforming the nature of the Israeli occupation but left numerous issues unresolved, including the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the disposition of Israeli settlements (whose expansion continues until today) and final borders between Israel and a Palestinian state.

Under the DoP, Israel relinquished day-to-day authority over parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank to the Palestinian Authority, headed by Arafat who returned to Gaza in 1994. However, ultimate power remained with Israel, which exercised its control by frequently sealing off the Palestinian-governed areas from the rest of the Occupied Territories and from Israel. Subsequent agreements in 1995 (Oslo I), 1998 (Wye River) and 1999 (Wye River II) failed to resolve these issues. With Palestinian-Israeli negotiations stalled, US President Bill Clinton called a summit at Camp David in July 2000. After two weeks of intensive negotiation, the talks ended without a deal.

OCCUPATION POLICIES

Israel has met the [current Palestinian] uprising with much greater force than it generally employed during the first intifada from 1987-1993. Numerous respected human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Physicians for Human Rights, conducted studies that showed Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers employing excessive force in their suppression of Palestinian demonstrators. Their reports cited (among other violations): the use of live ammunition against unarmed civilians; attacks on medical personnel and installations, and the use of snipers with high-powered rifles and attacks on children. Palestinians accused the IDF of implementing a “shoot to kill” policy against the demonstrators, an accusation Israel emphatically denied. But figures compiled by the Health, Development, Information and Policy Institute (HDI) showed that (as of December 2000) 75 percent of intifada-related wounds treated at West Bank health facilities were upper-body wounds (35.1 percent to the head and neck). In Gaza, 60 percent of wounds treated were in the head, chest, or abdomen (22.4 percent to the head and neck). International reports confirmed the preponderance of upper-body wounds.

Israel has periodically closed its borders to over 125,000 Palestinian workers — especially Gazans — who rely on jobs inside Israel for their modest income. The UN estimated that Palestinian workers lost $243,400,000 in income from October 2000 through January 2001 due to closures. According to UN figures, the poverty rate in the Occupied Territories climbed from 21 percent to nearly 32 percent over the same period. The poverty rate will reach 43 percent by the end of 2001 if closures continue, says the UN. Israeli forces have imposed blockades around Palestinian towns in the West Bank, sometimes causing severe shortages of necessities like flour, sugar, and gasoline.

WHAT ARE THE SETTLEMENTS?

The Jewish settlements scattered throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip sit on Palestinian land occupied by Israel during the June 1967 war. Since 1967, successive Israeli administrations have expanded the settlements in the name of both ideology and “security.” In ideological terms, historically endorsed by the Likud Party, settlements secure Jewish sovereignty over the entire biblical “Land of Israel,” demonstrating the power of Jewish nationalism. In security terms, historically endorsed by the Labor Party, settlements ensure Israel’s permanent military control west of the Jordan River. Regardless of rationale, settlements have been used to alter the demography of the Palestinian territories and preclude Palestinian self-determination.

The first wave of state-sponsored settlement began in 1967 under the Labor administration. Settlement growth was limited during this period, but the groundwork was laid for more. Labor used “security” arguments to justify settlement but allowed mesianic groups like Gush Emunim to establish claims in the Palestinian territories. Intensive development began in 1977 under Likud, which used the ideological rationale to justify heavy investment in the settlement infrastructure. Construction increased again in the early 1990s, during which time the settler population rose by some 10 percent annually. Since the Oslo “peace process” began in 1993, the settler population has nearly doubled. Under the Labor administration of Yitzhak Rabin, settlements grew at a rate unprecedented in Israel’s occupation. Ariel Sharon’s government vows to support the “natural growth” of settlements — a term that belies both the magnitude and political context of the planned expansion that is occurring. Currently, some 400,000 Israeli Jews live in the Occupied Territories: approximately 200,000 in the West Bank, 200,000 in East Jerusalem and 6,000 in the Gaza Strip.

All settlements in the Occupied Territories violate international law and continue to infringe on Palestinian human rights. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying state from transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. International humanitarian law prohibits permanent changes within an occupied territory that are not intended to benefit the local population.

The above is excerpted from an essay by Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) editorial committee members. A complete text of the essay is available at www.merip.org/archive/01/01_proclamations.html, with prints with permission.

n the Islamic world, the U.S. is seen in two quite different ways. One view recognizes what an extraordinary country the U.S. is. Every Arab or Muslim that I know is tremendously interested in the United States. Many of them send their children here for education. Many of them come here for vacations. They do business here or get their training here. The other view is of the official United States, the United States of armies and interventions. The United States that in 1953 overthrew the nationalist government of Mossadegh in Iran and brought back the shah. The united States that has been involved first in the Gulf War and then in the tremendously damaging sanctions against Iraqi civilians. The United States that is the supporter of Israel against the Palestinians.

Resources for Further Information

WEBSITES
FOR EDUCATORS
Rethinking Schools Online www.rethinkingschools.org, The articles in this special “War, Terrorism, and America’s Classrooms” insert are available at the Rethinking Schools website, many in pdf format. The website also includes many valuable links, including this web resource guide with hotlinks.

Teaching For Change/Network of Educators on the Americas www.teachingforchange.org. One of the best sites on teaching about September 11th and the “war against terrorism.” Excellent articles, links to other important sites, resources suggestions, etc.


GENERAL BACKGROUND
AlNet, a project of the Independent Media Institute www.alnet.org. Includes some of the best alternative points of view on social issues, including special coverage of the “war against terrorism.” Drawn from various sources.


Foreign Policy in Focus www.fpif.org. One of the finest in the world. See also reporting by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting www.aclu.org.

Extracts from articles by Robert Fisk are among the finest in the world. See also reporting by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting www.aclu.org.

Middle East/Central Asia


Arab Film Distribution www.arabfilm.com. Promotes and distributes films from the Arab world.

Harvard University/Center of Middle Eastern Studies www.fas.harvard.edu/~mideast/mi/areas.htm. One of the most significant collection of links to journals, newspapers, and organizations.


Middle East Research and Information Project www.merip.org. MERIP has been around for years, providing alternative perspectives on events in the Middle East. Useful links.


University of N, Carolina/Middle East and Islamic World Film Collections www.lib.unc.edu/cdd/crs/foreign/meiw/films.htm. Extensive annotated listings of films and videos.

University of Texas at Austin Middle East Network Information Center www.utexas.edu/hrd/mideast/mexic.html. Detailed country-by-country information on the Middle East and Central Asia.

University of Utah/Middle East Center Study Program www.lib.utah.edu/mideast/mei/mexdcen-tryr.htm. Especially helpful are links to newspapers in the Middle East.

CLASROOM RESOURCES

Beyond Blame www.edc.org/spotlight/schools/beyond-blame.htm. “Beyond Blame” is a free downloadable curriculum from Education Development Center, “in response to the terrorist tragedy of September 11th and subsequent attacks against Arab-Americans.” One lesson draws comparisons between recent events and the internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor.


“Bomboducks” comic strip www.rawa.org. The Bomboducks comic strip has been critical and profound during a period when much of American popular culture seems covert by conformist pro-war pressures. Excellent to use with students.


University of Arizona www.arizona.edu/learn/curriculum/texts/sep tern11Hubpages/education Curricula and teaching resources, sometimes uneven, but definitely worth a look.


Women Make Movies www.wmm.com/news/newsagainst_hate.htm. A multicultural, multimedia arts organization which has generously offered to provide free rentals for selected titles of Middle East and Arab culture videos. Also included are two documentaries on the U.S. Citizenship of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

The Day of Alhed's Secret, by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland. (NY: Loplop, Lee, and Sheppard Books, 1990) 32 pp. Alhed carries a secret in his pocket as he spends a day wandering the streets of Cairo. Only at the day's end is the secret revealed. Illustrations provide a glimpse into the lives of the city’s people.

Grades 1-5

Oasis of Peace; New Shalom — Wadi Al-Salam, by Laurie Dolfin, Photographs by Ben Dolfin. (Scholastic) 1991 48 pp. New Shalom/Wadi Al-Salam is the name — in Hebrew and in Arabic — of an Israeli village where 20 Arab and Jewish families have chosen to live together. This is the story of two boys who come to the village school, learn each other’s languages and customs, and become friends. A moving story, illustrated with color photos. Grades 1-6.

FOR OLDER STUDENTS

The Breadwinner, by Deborah Ellis, (Groundwood Books, 2001). 170 pp. A book about a family living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The central character is an 11-year-old girl who becomes the family breadwinner by cutting her hair and passing as a boy. Grades 5 and up.

Habibi, by Naomi Shihab Nye. (Simon and Schuster, 1997). 259 pp. When 14-year-old Lyana Abboud’s family moves from St. Louis, Missouri to Jerusalem her whole world shifts. She discovers her mother that she has never met before, aunts and uncles in a West Bank village and a history much bigger than she is. Grades 6 and up.

The Man Who Counted: A Collection of Mathematical Adventures, by Malba Tahan. (W. W. Norton, 1993) 244 pp. Gracefully told stories, each with a mathematical puzzle to solve, set in the 10th century Islamic world. (Depicts Arab and Muslim contributions to the history of mathematics. “Arabs” numeral and algebra, for example.) Grades 5 and up.


FOR ADULTS


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The Breadwinner, by Deborah Ellis, (Groundwood Books, 2001). 170 pp. A book about a family living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The central character is an 11-year-old girl who becomes the family breadwinner by cutting her hair and passing as a boy. Grades 5 and up.

Habibi, by Naomi Shihab Nye. (Simon and Schuster, 1997). 259 pp. When 14-year-old Lyana Abboud’s family moves from St. Louis, Missouri to Jerusalem her whole world shifts. She discovers her mother that she has never met before, aunts and uncles in a West Bank village and a history much bigger than she is. Grades 6 and up.

The Man Who Counted: A Collection of Mathematical Adventures, by Malba Tahan. (W. W. Norton, 1993) 244 pp. Gracefully told stories, each with a mathematical puzzle to solve, set in the 10th century Islamic world. (Depicts Arab and Muslim contributions to the history of mathematics. “Arabs” numeral and algebra, for example.) Grades 5 and up.


FOR ADULTS

“When Silence is Betrayal”

If the United States is to get on the ‘right side’ of world events, it must declare ‘eternal hostility’ to poverty, racism, and militarism.

On April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his first major speech on the war in Vietnam. In the speech, to the group Clergy and Laymen Concerned, King calls for a “shift from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society”—and insists that the “demands of inner truth” supersede unquestioning loyalty to government.

BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

A time comes when silence is betrayal. That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.

The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government’s policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformity thought within one’s own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty. But we must move on.

Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak.

Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America’s soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. So it is that those of us who are yet determined that America will be are led down the path of protest and dissent, working for the health of our land.

The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality we will find ourselves organizing Clergy and Laymen Concerned committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa.

We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies with our heads held high. But unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy...

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.

With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: “This is not just.” It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say: “This is not just.” The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just...

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust inures and thereby spread the day when “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.”

We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate...

Now let us begin. Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter — but beautiful — struggle for a new world.

To read the entire text of the speech, go to the College of Social Science at Michigan State University website at www.ssc.msu.edu/~sw/dates/mlk/brkslnc.htm.

Teaching Ideas

Write the speech that Martin Luther King might deliver today if he were alive. It should cover the events of September 11, “terrorism” of all kinds, and the war in Afghanistan — but can cover other topics as well.

Do you think Dr. King would support U.S. policies today? What evidence from his speech supports your conclusion? What policies would he urge?

King talks about the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism. In what ways are these giant triplets at work in today’s crisis? Ask students to make charts headed with these categories and to list all the ways they see these forces at work in the current circumstances. Ask them to choose one of the triplets and design a poster illustrating it.

Write a dialogue between Dr. King and another individual: you, George W. Bush, a member of the Taliban, one of the September 11 attackers, someone who fled the bombing of Afghanistan, a refugee in a camp in Gaza or the West Bank, etc.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11