WAR, TERRORISM AND OUR CLASSROOMS

Teaching in the Aftermath of the September 11th Tragedy

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Dear Reader:

The last year has not been an easy time for educators. After the deadly events of September 11, 2001, we all needed to help students grieve, to talk to them about what had happened, and to teach them about the world in which they live.

As educators committed to social justice, we believe that students need something different than a daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. You are receiving this reprint of our 9/11 special edition because we believe it contains valuable information and resources that can be shared with your students.

The Editors
N
o teacher education program could have prepared us to confront the emo-
tionally shattering events of Sept. 11. We began school that morning in one
era, but left that evening in a different era — one filled with sorrow, con-
fusion, and vulnerability. No matter what age student we work with, we
found ourselves rethinking and revising our lesson plans, if not our life plans.

In this special edition of Rethinking Schools, we offer two things: a range of per-
spectives from educators seeking to respond to students’ emotional and intellectual
needs in the current crisis; and background articles that provide social and historical
context to guide our work as educators. These efforts are tentative, intended more as a
point of departure than as final statement. We welcome feedback, and urge you to visit our
website where we have a section devoted to teaching about the aftermath of
Sept. 11: www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11.

Although the events of Sept. 11 changed many things, the core principles that
guide our curricular response were already in place:

Educators need to nurture student empathy. As Alfie Kohn urges in his article,
pages 5, “Schools should help children locate themselves in widening circles of care
that extend beyond self, beyond country, to all humanity.” In these pages, teachers use
poetry and letter writing to prompt students to imagine themselves as part of a
human, not just American, family (page 7 and page 9). Globalizing empathy can be espe-
cially difficult when textbooks and pundits alike use “us,” “we,” and “our” to promote a
narrow nationalism. It’s our job to reach beyond this chauvinism.

If there has been a “good” effect of Sept. 11, it has been the outpouring of generosity,
self-sacrifice, and solidarity. We should help students make these “circles of care” as wide
as possible.

We need to be multicultural and anti-racist. This stems both from a commitment to
the kind of world we want to live in — one where the lives of people of all races and cul-
tures are equally valued — as well as from a methodological imperative: The only way we
can make sense of this moment in history is through a multicultural lens. We hope this
sensibility weaves throughout this special

terings that have made the world a better place.

We 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 power words, and consequently must be critically examined. When Osama bin Laden was fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan, Pres-
ident Reagan called him a “freedom fighter.” Now he’s a terrorist. In the 1980s the U.S. gov-
ernment 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 move-
ments that have made the world a better place. They learn that obedience is a synonym for patri-
otism 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 differ-
cently 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 JAY GOULD

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 fallacy 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 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 pocketful 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 terror’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 meaning-less, 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. Twelve apple brown bettys into the breach. Twelve apple brown bettys for thousands of workers. And then I learned something important that I should never have forgotten — and the joke turned on me. Those 12 apple brown bettys went like literal hot cakes. These trivial symbols in my initial judgment turned into little drops of gold within a rainstorm of similar offerings for the stomach and soul, from children’s postcards to cheers by the roadside. We gave the last one to a firefighter, an older man in a young crowd, sitting alone in utter exhaustion as he inserted one of our shoe pads. And he said, with a twinkle and a smile restored to his face: “Thank you. This is the most lovely thing I’ve seen in four days — and still warm.”


A Time of Gifts

BY STEPHEN JAY GOULD

Even before the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan began on October 7, some 7.5 million Afghans were at risk of starving to death, due to the ongoing effects of decades of war, dislocation, repression, poverty and drought. Providing relief food is complicated by the fact that there are an estimated 10 million land mines in Afghanistan. Problems also erupted because the yellow U.S. food packets delivered by air were the same color as highly explosive U.S. cluster bombs.

Not in Our Son’s Name

Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez’s son Greg was one of the World Trade Center victims. The Rodriguezes 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, food 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 since they wrote this letter.

Find a newspaper letter to the editor about post-Sep- tember 11 events — terrorism, the war in Afghanistan, the new anti-terrorism legislation, etc. — and write your own letter in response. If you like, write this from the Rodriguezes’ perspective.

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

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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 Mathematics and Science (CLMS) conference. Apparently, someone on the CLMS board saw a copy of this essay (which had appeared only on Kohn’s website) and asked a member of the executive board 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, overtaken 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 groping 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 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 patiently 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 against humanity. We recognize that our suggestions aren’t long-term solutions. Those 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 furnishes 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 United States 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 the same time, President Bush has stated that the “war” on terrorism would be lengthy, implying that it would go on for years.

In order to rely on 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 recent attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon have brought to the surface a lot of ignorant beliefs and stereotypes about Islam. Clearly, it is past time for teachers to educate themselves and their students about what is the second largest religion in the world.

One way to start discussions is to ask students to:
1. List stereotypes about Islam and/or Muslims.
2. List everything they know about Islam and/or Muslims.

When I ask about Islam, I often get blank stares, followed by stammerings such as, “Muslims pray a lot,” or, “They believe in Allah” (or, as one of my students told me, “They believe in All.”). Some students have even told me that all Muslim men have, and possibly are required to have, more than one wife.

One common misconception is that jihad can be easily translated as “holy war.” Jihad actually translates as “to strive in the way of God.” So a person who studies Islam, preaches Islam, or defends an Islamic country is jihad. It is not someone who initiates violence in the name of Islam. In fact, the literal translation of the word “Islam” is “peace.”

This misunderstanding stems, in part, from the fact that many non-Muslim Americans do not understand that Islam is a way of life. Because Muslims don’t necessarily see boundaries between nation-states the way Americans do, their patriotism is more about the religion than a particular country. Also, because of religious/racial portrayal in the media and elsewhere, Muslims are one of the few groups who are consistently identified by religion when they are accused of committing terrorist acts.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT ISLAM

Part of the problem is that many teachers approach Islam as if it were some distant, ancient religion. Yet there are six million Muslims in the United States, and Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the country. Here is some basic information about Islam that can help teachers educate their students.

• Islam is the name of the religion; Muslim refers to its followers.
• Worldwide, there are 1.2 billion Muslims. Islam is the dominant religion throughout large portions of Asia and Africa, with the largest Muslim populations living in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
• Islam is the third of the three largest monotheistic religions, in addition to Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that the Qur’an is God’s word as revealed to the prophet Muhammad (570-632) through the angel Gabriel. This is the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Eid al-Fitr is at the end of Ramadan. There are two major holidays in Islam: Eid al Adha is at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Eid al Fitr is at the end of Ramadan.
• Islam is a very family-oriented. The primary means of communicating the religion are through the family. Therefore parents, both mothers and fathers, take on a big responsibility when raising children. This family orientation also translates into a community-oriented way of life that can greatly conflict with Western notions of individuality.

While this article does not begin to make other teachers “experts,” hopefully it can give you some confidence in starting a dialogue in your own classrooms. Here are some websites for further information:

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), www.adc.org
American Muslim Council (AMC), www.amconline.org
American Muslim Alliance (AMA), www.amaweb.org
American Muslim Council (AMC), www.amconline.org
Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), www.cair-net.org
Islamic Institute, www.islamicinstitute.org

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

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 Muslims but there are also millions of Christian Arabs and thousands of Jewish 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 American Arabs?

Arab Americans are Americans of Arab descent. There are Americans 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.

This article is also available as a letter-size PDF for student handouts at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11
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 frustrated 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 to whom they would write, I sat down to write my letter.

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

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 about 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.

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

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 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.”

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.

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 up 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!”

Following are excerpts from two of the letters:

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.

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

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 fire in the city air.

2. i have never been so hungry that i willed hunger
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,

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, 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 hearts 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 uncertainties. 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 snatching 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 at 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:

• Enquire 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, or 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.

• 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.

• Engulf the children in tenderness. At home, create time for long, cozy evenings — a new family ritual about peace, or 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.

• 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.

• 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 captive, 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 this 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 the overt racist images in our culture that define “bad guys” as people with olive-colored or brown skin, an Arab 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, 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, please, 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 talk sounds 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 questioned 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, 2002).
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 fell to me, obligatory patriot—

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 to 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 woman. 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 come to let us know our family, our friends escaped. But as a Palestinian American, Hammad also captures the fear that many Arabs felt after Sept. 11th, we shared two poems “We Would Like You To Know” by Ana Castillo and Janet Wong’s “Waiting at the Railroad Café.” We told them they could use either poem as a model for their own writing.

(Wong’s poem is in Rethinking Our Classrooms, Vol. 2 and also available at www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11. Janet Wong has a student-friendly website www.janetwong.org.)

Castillo’s poem, in which she counterposes stereotypes about Latinos with more accurate information, is an excellent prompt for students to engage in writing about discrimination. We read Castillo’s poem and, using the graph format, we generated lists of words or phrases typically used to stereotype Arab Americans, and then opposing lists to deflate those stereotypes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We Are Not</th>
<th>We Are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All terrorists</td>
<td>Family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All murderers</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the Taliban</td>
<td>American citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not all wear turbans</td>
<td>We were born in this country and are U.S. citizens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Kristin Eberman followed Castillo’s format in her poem:

We would like you to know
we are not all part of the Taliban
nor followers of bin Laden.
We were born in this country and are U.S. citizens.

Wong’s poem “Waiting at the Railroad Café” powerfully portrays an Asian father and daughter and their differing reactions to the discrimination they face at a café. After reading the poem, not load, we asked students to locate the two different forms of discrimination in the poem: One is passive — a waitress ignores them; the other is active — a drunk yells at them.

After discussing the content of the poem, we pointed out how Wong creates a movie close-up of 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.

“We’re not going!”

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 firing 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.

Linda Christensen (lchristensen@pps.k12.or.us) is high school language arts coordinator for Portland, OR Public Schools, and an editor of Rethinking Schools.
The World Up Close
A 5th grade teacher helps his students explore issues of war and terrorism as they look at the war in Afghanistan.

BY BOB PETERSON

It was Sept. 12 when Rafael, one of my fifth graders, 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 Afghanistan in October. “Will they bomb us like we are bombing them?” one student asked.

Sometimes we stop and immediately talk about such questions. On this day 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 (Atheneum, 1981). After reading the poem I encouraged students to write their own versions. One wrote:

“I would have houses
they are poor to us
We have houses
they have refugee camps with tents
We have shoes
some of them do not
We cry sad cries.
They sometimes cry bad cries.
But we are all sisters and brothers in God’s Way!”

GLOBAL INEQUALITIES

As part of social studies and math, students do activities that alert them to the inequities in the world’s wealth and power. We look at child labor, hunger, colonialism, and the UN’s Declaration of the Rights of the Child. While I have always done such lessons, after Sept. 11 they became more useful in helping students understand why some might resent the United States. While our attention currently is focused on the U.S. war in Afghanistan, I frame such involvement in broader issues of global exploitation.

One good resource is a short video from the Canadian organization, Adbusters, explaining that while North Americans constitute only 5 percent of the world’s population, we consume 33 percent of the world’s resources and produce 50 percent of the world’s non-organic waste.

We also do a lesson on “World Poverty and World Resources” (explained in detail in Rethinking Our Classrooms, Vol. 1). Groups of children each represent an equal percent of the world’s population and each group is given chocolate chip cookies to reflect the distribution of resources. Needless to say, some groups get more cookies than others, and emotions run high. The students make graphs, write about their feelings such as stereotypes, and most importantly ask questions such as, “Why does Asia have so many people and so little resources?” “How did Europe and North America get to be so wealthy?” “Why are things so unfair?”

SEPT. 11 AND THE WAR

Students have polled their families and we’ve graphed our own opinions about the U.S. war in Afghanistan. At the time of this writing, more supported the war than opposed it, although most see both “good and bad” in what the United States is doing. Virtually all say they are scarred.

News commentators have consistently argued that Sept. 11 changed the world forever. Working with preadolescent children, I see matters differently. These fifth graders are just becoming aware of the world around them, so they have little to compare to the current situation. For them, the world isn’t so much changed as it is, for the first time, out there in front of them — in their face, so to speak.

For those working with this age group, current events are full not only of heartaches but incredible opportunities. As teachers, we have two formidable responsibilities: to help this emotionally volatile age group to express their feelings and thoughts and to help them developing minds examine underlying issues of global injustice.

One girl who said she supported the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan when it started later wrote this poem.

Somebody please drop bombs on Afghanistan
Every time a Taliban attacks a person

Twisting
Turning
Turning
Twisting and Turning

My feelings are burning
Like the Twin Towers
My heart is broken
from all the hating
All the killings in Afghanistan
has made my heart to start
Twisting, My feelings are burning
My heart is broken.

She gave it to me and said, “We need to learn
about this stuff so I can really understand what’s
going on over there.”

Bob Peterson (repmilw@aol.com) teaches fifth grade at La Escuela Framley in Milwaukee and is an editor of Rethinking Schools.
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 know 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 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 via 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 tratando de escapar, 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 into them.]

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 United States began attacking Afghanistan.

Los soldados [Soldiers.]

Bombas listas para lanzar [Bombs getting ready to be launched.]

Fotos de Osama bin Laden [Pictures of bin Laden.]

I then asked the students if they had seen any of the people in Afghanistan since the attacks began. No hands. I asked if they had seen any pictures of Afghanistan. One student raised his hand and mentioned something about a bomb dropping in the middle of a barren field.

Pensé en esto mientras ven las noticias en los días que vienen. Presten atencion y vean si hay personas, I said. [Keep this in mind as you watch the news in the next few days. Look closely and see if you see any people.]

That Friday, five days after the bombing began, I brought all the newspapers I had received since the U.S. attacked Afghanistan. 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 $10. (Por qué hay tiendas que venden armas? one student wanted to know [Why are there stores that sell guns?])

One group found a page that 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.”]

Throughout the war in Afghanistan, pictures of human suffering have remained scarce. In our local paper the images were dominated by photos of fighters from the Northern Alliance and maps with dots and starbursts to show where the bombs fell. (The New York Times has done a better job, but most students only see those photos if I bring them to class.)

On the anniversary of Sept. 11, I want to help my students to expand their compassion beyond those who died in the World Trade Center attacks and develop a sense of empathy for victims of the U.S. bombing in Afghanistan. I also want my students to ask whether the U.S. media are reliably reporting what is happening around the world.

Here 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.

By Kelley Dawson

Kelley Dawson teaches fourth grade at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, and is an editor 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 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 — almost 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 in 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.”

Questions: 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 decision.

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 classroom to teach this lesson to her 11th grade Global Studies students. I began by asking students to write down their own personal definitions of terrorism, and to keep these questions in mind: Does terrorism need to involve the killing of many people or can it affect just one person? Can it involve simply the destruction of property, with no injuries? Can governments commit acts of terrorism, or is the term reserved only for people who operate outside of governments? Must terrorism involve the people of one country attacking citizens of another country? Does motive make a difference? Does terrorism need to be intentional?

Immediately following, I explained to students that, in preparation for an activity, I’d like them to get into small groups and read their individual definitions to one another to see if they could build a consensus definition of terrorism. They could choose an exemplary definition from one member or, if they preferred, cobble one together from their separate definitions.

Some groups quickly agreed upon definitions; others would have spent the entire 83-minute class if Sandra and I had let them. In most cases, the definitions were simple, but thoughtful. For example, “intentional acts that create terror, targeted towards a specific group, or innocent people. Not just directly, but indirectly.”

I distributed the “What is Terrorism?” scenarios to students, reviewed the instructions with them, and emphasized that all the scenarios were real. Their main task was to read each situation and to decide whether any of the actions described met their group’s definition of “terrorism.” I made sure they understood that Country A in one situation would not necessarily be the same Country A in the next situation, and gave them permission to approach the situations in whatever order they liked.

The challenge for social justice movements is to connect economic inequality with the security concerns that now grip us all — insisting that justice and equality are the most sustainable strategies against violence and fundamentalism.

— Naomi Klein, author and global justice activist, writing in The Nation, Oct. 22.
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: 2,700
- 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: 73,600
- 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

*All figures are approximate.


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 outlined four different "definitions":

1. Terrorism is a modern barbarism that we call terrorism.
2. Terrorism is a form of political violence.
3. Terrorism is an attack on Western civilization.
4. 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 broad definition, but is too broad to be meaningful. The third and fourth “definitions” propose that terrorism is a Really Bad Thing done by Other People — Other People, presumably, who are not Westerners.

TERRORISM'S GHOSTS

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, the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy offered the perspective of an individual who is on the receiving end of U.S. global power:

The Sept. 11 attacks were a monstrous calling card from a world gone horribly wrong. The 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 — backed by the U.S. — invaded Lebanon in 1982, 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, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, at the hands of the terroristic governments whom the American government supported, trained, bankrolled and supplied with arms. And this is far from being a comprehensive list.

It’s not our role as teachers to climb on our soapbox to rail about U.S. foreign policy. And yet without an honest examination of events like those listed by Roy, how can we expect students to maintain any critical perspective on the U.S. “war against terrorism”? 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 curricular 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, Nabil Ahmed, comments in a letter 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.”

Bill Bigelow (btbigelow@akaj.com) is an editor of Rethinking Schools.
‘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

M y 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, Ca-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 Wisconsin law, all public schools are required 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 vibrato 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 a way to remember the people who had died in the Sept. 11 attack. “They treated them like slaves. That’s not equal when white people treat Black people,” said Tyesha.

Under Wisconsin law, all public schools are required only an instrumental version of the Star Spangled Banner; after public protest, it reverted to a policy that instructs each principal to implement a 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 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. A full month after the daily Pledge was instituted, more children felt the peer pressure and joined in. Jeremy, however, remained adamant in not saying the Pledge, and I told him I supported his right to do so as he believes.

As I write, the sunlight streams through my classroom “flag,” a stained-glass rainbow bow 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 not to say the Pledge. I hope the cheers and jeers of patriotic fervor will not silence their rights.
The Supreme Court on The Pledge

The last time the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the Pledge of Allegiance was in June 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 expulsion. 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 are excerpts from the decision, which can be found at http://laws.findlaw.com/us/316/624.html.

T o sustain the compulsory flag salute we are required to say that a Bill of Rights which guarantees 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 whose essential to their time and country have been waged by many good as well 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 toward unity becomes greater, so strikes become more bitter until there is a unity. 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 and youth shall unite in embracing. Utter futility of such attempts to compel cohesion 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 fast failing efforts of our present totalitarian regimes. Those who have evinced a determination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters.

Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graybar. It seems true but necessary to say that the First Amendment to our Constitution was designed to avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings.

We set up government by consent of the governed, and the Bill of Rights denies those in power any legal opportunity to coerce that consent.

To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriots are voluntary and spontaneous instead of a compulsory routine is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds. …

But freedom to differ is not limited to things that do not matter much. The Bill of Rights would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the 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 transgress constitutitional 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 preserve from all official control.

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 can be agreement, argument, questions, or other observations.

What is the relationship between patriotism and saying the Pledge? Advise students to base their answers on the text.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1943 that, “Patriotism seems to be falling to whoever claims it. …” Have students write definitions of patriotism. Ask them to give examples of “patriotism in action.”

An Alternative to War

Continued from page 5


2. Request the establishment of 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.

3. Establish an international military or police force under the control of the UN and which resort to an ever-increasing severity. As governmental pressure toward unity becomes greater, so strikes become more bitter until there is a unity. 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 and youth shall unite in embracing. Utter futility of such attempts to compel cohesion 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 fast failing efforts of our present totalitarian regimes. Those who have evinced a determination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters.

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 schools to be the main sites of celebration. Why Columbus? Because he symbolized America’s supposed pioneer spirit and his voyage made possible 400 years of “progress and freedom.”

The original “Pledge to the Flag” was included in The Official Programme for the National Columbian Public School Celebration of October 21, 1892. On that day, with increasing numbers of eastern and southern European immigrants entering the United States, an estimated 10 million children first recited the pledge.

Choose one of the instructional tasks and hands to the side, to face the flag, and then to give the flag a military salute with “right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it.”

Standing thus, the Official Programme 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, toward the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereverupon all hands immediately drop to the side.”

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

The arm-extended flag salute was the norm in American schools until 1942. While the similarity with the fascist salute 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.

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

Will USA Patriot Act foster harassment of legitimate political dissent?

President Bush signed an “anti-terrorism” law Oct. 26, 2001 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/congress/archives.html.

BY THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Section 802 of the final version of the anti-terrorism legislation, the Uniting and Strengthening 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 over-broad 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 provides assistance to that person, even if the assistance is an act as minor as providing lodging. They would have the authority to wiretap the home of anyone providing assistance. Also, the government could prosecute the person who provided their home under a new crime of “harboring” a terrorist (Section 803) or for “providing material support” to “terrorists.”

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 fact sheets on how the new anti-terrorism law:

- Expands Law Enforcement “Sneak and Peak” Warrants
- Puts Student Privacy at Risk
- Permits Indefinite Detention of Immigrants Who Are Not Terrorists
- Puts Financial Privacy at Risk
- Limits Judicial Oversight of Telephone and Internet Surveillance
- Allows for Detention of People Engaging in Innocent Associational Activity
- 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 fact sheet/citigage, 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 “reasonable belief” 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 interrogated 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 undetermined 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 has 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
“Stimulus” Money Grab

One of the features of post-Sept. 11 initiatives has been the effort of powerful companies to enhance their wealth and influence. The following article outlines some of the beneficiaries of the House-passed tax-cut bill designed to stimulate the economy after Sept. 11. A final version of this legislation became law in March 2002. This article along with materials on the subsequent corporate scandals with Enron, WorldCom, etc. may be useful in helping students examine the interplay of taxation and power in the United States.

BY CITIZENS FOR TAX JUSTICE

The “stimulus” tax-cut bill approved by the House calls for some $25 billion in immediate tax rebates to large profitable corporations that paid the low-rate “alternative minimum tax” over the past decade and a half because loopholes cut their regular income tax bills to little or nothing. Some $7.4 billion of these corporate rebate checks would be made out to just 16 tax-avoiding Fortune 500 companies — each of which would get more than $100 million in rebates. These companies reported a total of more than $42 billion in pretax U.S. profits last year. [New York Times columnist Paul Krugman noted Oct. 31, 2001 that many of those who will benefit from the House bill are based in or near Texas and are in the energy or mining businesses. Above all, Krugman wrote, “the big winners in all this seem to be companies that gave large, one-sided donations to the Republican Party in the last election.”]

Topping the list of beneficiaries in the House bill is IBM, which is slated to get a $1.4 billion rebate check. Ford, with a $1 billion offer, followed by General Motors at $833 million, General Electric at $671 million, TXU (Texas Utilities) at $608 million, Daimler-Chrysler at $600 million, and ChevronTexaco at $572 million.

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 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.cjt.org

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?

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, Ill.: Three hundred people shouted 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 a one-inch thick glass. (The Times Online.)

• 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, Meadville, 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.)

• Sept. 19, Lincoln Park, MI: 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 1-202-244-2990, or send email to legal@adc.org.

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

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 all 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.
New World Disorder
The questions must be asked: Does Infinite Justice for some mean Infinite Injustice for others?

The following is condensed from an essay by prize-winning Indian novelist Arundhati Roy. Her writings on Sept. 11 and its aftermath have appeared widely in publications around the world. However, as of Nov. 3, no major U.S. newspaper or magazine had agreed to publish her recent essays, according to a report in the <i>New York Times</i>.

BY ARUNDATHI 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 grisly toll 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 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 freedoms 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 worshipped, almost deified, 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 cru-cible of rubble, heroin and land mines in the backwash of the Cold War. Its oldest leaders are in their early forties. 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 $40 billion worth of arms and ammunition was poured into Afghanistan. The latest weaponry was the only shard 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 rubble is being pounded into finer dust.

Put your ear to the ground in this part of the world, and you can hear the thundering, the deadly drumbeat of burgeoning anger. Please, please stop the war. Enough people have been killed. The smart missiles are just not smart enough. They’re blowing up whole warehouses 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, was published by South End Press.

This article originally appeared in the <i>Guardian</i> newspaper in Britain on Oct. 23. A complete copy of the text is available at www.guardian.co.uk/archive/0,4273,41283041,00.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 thundering, 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
Backyard Terrorism
Washington has been training terrorists at a Georgia base for years and is still at it.

BY GEORGE MONBIOT

"I f any government sponsors the outliers and killers of innocents," George Bush announced on the day he began bombing Afghanistan, "they have become outliers 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 it has been running 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 (WHISC). It is based in Fort Benning, Ga., and it is funded by Mr. Bush’s govern- ment.

Until January, 2001, WHISC was called the “School of the Americas” (SOA). Since 1941, 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, dic-
tators, 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, Rios 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 as having 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 its principal concentration camps. One of them helped to murder Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffit in Washington, DC in 1976.

Argentina’s dictators 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 Group Colina death squad in Fujimori’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 Ocoyocac massacre in Mexico. Admiral Gene Keating 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 Group Colina death squad in Fujimori’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 Ocoyocac massacre in Mexico.

All this, the school’s defenders insist, is ancient his-
tory. But SOA graduates are also involved in the dirty war now being waged, with U.S. support, in Colombia. In 1999 the U.S. State Department’s report on human rights named two SOA graduates as the murderers of the peace commissioner, Alex Lopera. 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, 2001, 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 U.S. government was forced to release seven of the school’s training manuals. Among their top tips for terrorists, they recommended black-
mail, torture, execution, and the arrest of witnesses’ relatives.

In 2000, partly as a result of the campaign run by SOA Watch, several U.S. 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 its old name.

George Monbiot is a weekly columnist for The Guardian and author of Captive State: the cor-
porate takeover of Britain. This article is condensed from the Oct. 30, 2001 Guardian. A com-
plete text of the article is available at www.monbiot.com. Reprinted with permission of author and The Guardian. ©George Monbiot

Teaching Ideas
George Monbiot closes his article with the question, “What should we do about the “evil-doers” in Fort Benning, Ga.?” Ask students how they would answer that ques-
tion.

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 for 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.rethinkingschools.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 sweat-
shop in the Philippines or crushes efforts of workers to organize in Singapore. We don’t see ourselves implicated when the U.S. refuses to consider the plight of Pales-
tinian refugees or uses the excuse of fighting drugs to support repression in Colom-
bia or other parts of Central America. We don’t even see the symbolism when

despite the roots of terrorism?

The above is condensed from an essay in TIKKUN magazine, a journal of Jewish politics and cul-
ture. Reprinted with permission. To subscribe to TIKKUN magazine, and for the text of the com-
plete essay, go to www.tikkun.org

Teaching Ideas
Michael Lerner says that “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?’” What is his answer to that question? What is your answer?

Compare the changes that Roy, Lerner, and Martin Luther King (page 24) would like to see in our society.

Lerner writes that “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-terror 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 condi-
tions 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 found how to get along in the world and to the sacred in each other because we are so used to look-
ing at others from the standpoint of what they can do for us. Our 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.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of TIKKUN Magazine and rabbi of Boyt Tikkun Synagogue in San Francisco. The above is condensed from an essay in TIKKUN magazine, a journal of Jewish politics and culture. Reprinted with permission. To subscribe to TIKKUN magazine, and for the text of the com-
plete essay, go to www.tikkun.org
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. KLARe

T
here 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 significant 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 Southwest 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 adviser, 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.”

For most of the past 500 years, the Middle East has actually seen less violence and warfare and more political stability than Europe or most other regions of the world. It has only been in the last century that the region has seen such widespread conflict. The roots of the conflict are similar to those elsewhere in the Third World, and have to do with the legacy of colonialism, such as artificial political boundaries, autocratic regimes, militarization, economic inequality, and economies based on the export of raw materials for finished goods. Indeed, the Middle East has more autocratic regimes, militarization, economic inequality and the greatest ratio of exports to domestic consumption than any region in the world.

—Stephen Zunes, from the article, “10 Things to Know About the Middle East,” available online at www.alternet.org.

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Michael T. Klare is a professor at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, with the Five College Program in Peace & World Security Studies. This article originally was published in the Nov. 5 issue of The Nation. Reprinted with permission.
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 septicemia. I turned to my guide, a member of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, and asked him about the prognosis for the children. Normally a calm, restrained man, he suddenly broke down. ‘I have not seen them since the war began,’ he said, ‘we have no medicine and we cannot provide care for them. This is the worst situation we have ever faced.’

I offered a teddy bear to a little boy nearby. His mother was standing between him and his brother. Both were dying from septicemia. 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.

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

As a delegate with various humanitarian organizations, I visited Iraq several times in 1998 and 1999. Sanctions were first imposed by the United Nations, under the leadership of the United States, in August 1990 following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. The sanctions were intended to reduce Iraq’s ability to purchase goods and services from the West. They would continue until Iraq concedes to a list of conditions, including the elimination of its weapons of mass destruction and ongoing UN monitoring of its weapons capabilities.

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 born 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 underweight, twice as high as the levels in neighboring Jordan and 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 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 rations have 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 bomb

Afghanistan: The Route to Riches

BY ANDY ROWELL

As 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 exploitative geo-political equation is the sensitive issue of securing control and export of the region’s vast oil and gas reserves. The Soviets 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 resource was 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 natural gas and oil exports from central Asia to the Arabian Sea.”

To the north of Afghanistan lies 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 $76 billion 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. Kazakhstan, it is believed, could earn $700 billion 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 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 deal to exploit reserves estimated at 3.5-5 billion barrels in Azerbaijan.

The oil industry has long been trying to find a way to bring the oil and gas to market. This frustration was evident in the submission by oil company Unocal’s vice-president John Maresca, before the U.S. House of Representatives in 1998: “Central Asia is isolated. Their natural resources are landlocked, both geographically and politically. Each of the countries in the Caucasus and central Asia faces difficult political challenges. Some have unsettled wars or latent conflicts.”

The industry has been looking at different routes. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) route is 1,900 miles west from Tengiz in Kazakhstan to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk and came on stream in October. Oil will go by tanker through the Bosporus to the Mediterranean. Another route being considered by AIOC goes from Baku through Tbilisi in Georgia to Ceyhan in Turkey. However, parts of the route are seen as politically unstable as it goes through the Kurdish region of Turkey and its $3 billion price tag is prohibitively expensive.

But even if these pipelines are built, they would not be enough to exploit the region’s vast oil and gas reserves. Nor crucially would they have the capacity to move oil to where it is really needed — the emerging markets of Asia. Other export pipelines must therefore be built. One option is to go east across China, but at 5,000 kilometer it is seen as too long. Another option is through Iran, but U.S. companies are banned due to U.S. sanctions. The only other possible route is through Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Unocal, the U.S. company with a controversial history of investment in Burma, has been trying to secure the Afghan route. To be viable Unocal has made it clear that “construction of the pipeline cannot begin until a recognized government is in place in Kabul that has the confidence of governments, lenders, and our company.”

The above was condensed from an Oct. 24, 2001 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/sep11
implementing a “shoot to kill” policy against children. Palestinians accused the IDF of targeting medical personnel and installations, and the use of excessive force in their suppression of Palestinian demonstrators. Their reports cited instances of Israeli forces injuring civilians and targeting those who were armed only with rocks or stones. Human Rights organizations, including Amnesty International, conducted studies that showed Israeli soldiers employed tactics that were in violation of international law.

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 Madrid peace conference followed the Gulf war in October, 1991. 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.

With the DoP, Israeli forces have imposed blockades around Palestinian towns, including Nablus, Jenin, and Gaza. With the Allied victory in the end of 2001 if closures continue, says the UN. The UN estimated that Palestinian workers lost some 400,000,000 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.

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/new_uprising_primer/_intro.html.
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

ESR Metro
www.esrmetro.org. New York City educators have assembled a comprehensive site on intercultural education, and social justice education. Website has lesson ideas on these subjects as well as Iraq, Palestine/Israel, nuclear weapons, and more.

Educators for Social Responsibility
www.ers.org. Offers some of the best alternative points of view on social issues, including special coverage of the “war against terrorism.” Drawn from various public, private, and community-based sources.

American Civil Liberties Union
www.aclu.org. Resources on the threat to civil liberties in the U.S. during the crisis.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting

FOR EDUCATORS
AlterNet, a project of the Independent Media Institute
www.alternet.org. One of the best sites on teaching about the current crisis including a guide on “Talking to Children about Violence and other Sensitive and Complex Issues in the World.” The Nation magazine

NY Teachers, Educators, Youth Work- ers and Students Against the War
www.topica.com/lists/NYTeachAgainst- theWar. This group has a very active list of New York area educators who are organizing and teaching about the war. Click on “read this list” to see archived posts. The Progressive magazine

War Times
www.wartimes.org. A free bilingual English/Spanish newspaper that is “dedi- cated to telling the truth about the ‘war on terrorism.’” Issues cover chronic U.S. Nuclear Threat, Palestine, attacks on immigrants, and more. Accessible articles with background information. For classroom use—25 copies (or more) of each issue—to contact distribution@wartimes.org. PDF files of articles available.

Arab Film Distribution

Harvard University/Center of Middle Eastern Studies
www.fas.harvard.edu/ e-mideast/AllEmRes/ dAllEmRes.htm. One of the most extensive collections of links to journals, newspapers, and other resources on the Middle East. Useful links.

Human Rights Watch report

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

Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan

CLASSROOM RESOURCES
Beyond Blame
www.edc.org/spotslights/schools/beyond- blame.htm. “Beyond Blame” is a free downloadable curriculum from Education Development Center, “in response to the unfolding tragic history of September 11 and sub- sequent attacks against Arab-Americans.” One lesson draws comparisons between the September events and the internment of Japan- ese Americans after Pearl Harbor.


American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
www.adc.org. An essential resource for materials countering bias and stereotypes about Arabs. Website includes many edu- cational resources.

“Boofoocks” comic strip
www.oomies.com/boofoocks. “Boofoocks” comic strip has become critical and profound during a period when much of American popular culture seems coveted by a conformist pro-war pressure. Excellent to use with students.

Mark Fiore Gallery

Maps
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/a fghanistan/maps.htm. One of the most extensive collections of maps and resources on Afghanistan.

University of Arizona
www.arizona.edu/economics/sep- tember11/pager/education. Curricula and teaching resources, sometimes uneven, but definitely worth a look.


The Arabic Activities for the Elementary School Level

Women Make Movies

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

The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East, by Naomi Shihab Nye (editor). (Simón and Shuster, 1998). Poems and paintings of more than 100 writers and artists from 19 countries. Expresses beautiful, painfully direct, and ultimately a joyful book.

FOR ADULTS


Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fun- damentalism in the Central Asia, by Ahmed Rashid. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). “A Pakistani journalist, this is one of the best books to understand the history of the Taliban.

Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World, by Edward Said (NY: Vintage, 1997). All of Edward Said’s books are excellent. This one is an incisive critique of media bias and isolationism.

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, J.R.

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 conformist 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 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 without end 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 mores and thereby speed 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 Sept. 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 Sept. 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/sep11
Root Causes of Terrorism

An interview with scholar Edward Said

The following is excerpted from an interview with Edward W. Said, a professor of English at Columbia University and a prominent scholar on Middle Eastern issues. Said was interviewed in late September by David Barsamian of Alternative Radio.

Q: What are those root causes [of the current terrorism]?

Said: They come out of a long dialectic of U.S. involvement in the affairs of the Islamic world, the oil-producing world, the Arab world, the Middle East—those areas that are considered to be essential to U.S. interests and security. And in this relentlessly unfolding series of interactions, the U.S. has played a very distinctive role, why in most Americans have been either shielded from or simply unaware of.

In 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 Moosadeh 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.

If you go to the area, you see these things as part of a continuing drive for dominance, and with it a kind of obduracy, a stubborn opposition to the wishes and desires and aspirations of the people there. Most Arabs and Muslims feel that the United States hasn’t really been paying much attention to their desires. They think it has been pursuing its policies for its own sake and not according to many of the principles they are fighting for—democracy, self-determination, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and international law. It’s very hard, for example, to justify the 34-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It’s very hard to justify 140 Israeli settlement rough 400,000 settlers. These actions were taken with the support and financing of the United States. How can you say this is part of U.S. adherence to the official U.N. resolutions? The result is a kind of schizophrenic picture of the United States.

Now we come to the really sad part. The Arab rulers are basically unpopu-
lar. They are supported by the United States against the wishes of their peo-
ple. In all the Arab states, there is a ready mixture of violence and policies that are remarkably unpopular right down to the last iota, it’s not hard for demagogues, especially people who claim to speak in the name of religion, in this case Islam, to raise a crusade against the United States and say that we must somehow bring America down.

Ironically, many of these people, including Osama bin Laden and the mujahedeen, were, in fact, nourished by the United States in the early 1980s in its efforts to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. It was thought that to rally Islam against godless communism would be doing the Soviet Union a very bad turn indeed, and that is, in fact, trans-
spired. In 1985, a group of mujahedeen came to Washington and was greeted by President Rea-
gan, who called them “freedom fighters.” These people, by the way, do not represent Islam in any formal sense. They’re not imams or sheiks. They are self-
appointed warriors for Islam. Osama bin Laden, who is a Saudi, feels himself to be a patriot because the U.S. has forces in Saudi Arabia, which is sacred because it is the land of the prophet Muhammad. Here is also this great sense of tri-
umphalism, that just as we defeated the Soviet Union, we can do this. And out of this sense of desparation and pathological religion, there develops an all-
compassing drive to harm and hurt, without regard for the innocent and the uninvolved, which was the case in New York. Now to understand this is, of course, not at all to condone it. And what terrifies me is that we’re entering a phase if you start to speak about this as something that can be understood—historically—without any sympathy—you are going to be thought of as unapologetic, and you are going to be forbidden. It’s very dangerous. It is precisely incumbent on everyone to try to understand the world we’re living in and the history we are a part of and we are forming as a superpower.

Q: In your introduction to the updated version of Covering Islam: How the Media and The Experts Determine How We See The Rest of The World, you say: “Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West.” Why is that?

Said: The sense of Islam as a threaten-
ing Other—with Muslims depicted as fanatical, violent, lustful, irrational—
develops during the colonial period in what I called Orientalism. The study of the Other has a lot to do with the con-	trol and dominance of Europe and the West generally in the Islamic world. And it has persisted because it’s based very, very deeply in religious roots, where Islam is seen as a kind of com-
petitor of Christianity. You look at the curricula of most universities and schools in this country, considering our long encounter with the Islamic world, there is very little that you can get hold of that is really informative about Islam. If you look at the popular media, you’ll see that the stereotype that begins with Rudolph Valentino in The Sheik has really remained and devel-
oped into the transnational villain of television and film culture in gen-
eral. It is very easy to make wild general-
izations about Islam. All you have to do is read almost any issue of The New

Republican and you’ll see there the radi-
cal evil that’s associated with Islam, the Arabs as having a depraved culture, and so forth. These are impossible general-
izations to make in the United States about any other religious or ethnic group.

Q: In a recent article in the Lon-
don Observer, you say the U.S. drive for war uncannily resem-
bles Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick. Tell me what you have in mind there.

Said: Captain Ahab was a man pos-
sessed with an obsession drive to pur-
sue the white whale which had harmed him—which had torn his leg off—to the ends of the Earth, no matter what happened. In the final scene of the novel, Captain Ahab is being borne out to sea, wrapped around the white whale with the rope of his own harpoon and going obviously to his death. It was a scene of almost suicidal finality. Now, all the words that George Bush used in public during the early stages of the cri-
sis—“wanted, dead or alive,” “a crus-
de” etc.—suggest not so much an orderly and considered progress towards bringing the man to justice according to international norms, but rather something apocalyptic, some-
thing of the order of the criminal atroc-
ity itself. That will make matters a lot, lot worse, because there are always con-
sequences. And it would seem to me that to give Osama bin Laden—who has been made a symbol of all that’s evil in the world—a kind of mythological pro-
portion is really playing his game. I think we need to secularize the man. We need to bring him down to the realm of reality. Treat him as a crimi-
nal, as a man who is a demagogue, who has unlawfully unleashed violence against innocent people. Punish him accordingly, and don’t bring down the world around him and ourselves.

A complete copy of the interview, both audio and written transcripts, can be ordered from Alternative Radio at http://www.alterna-
tive.org or by calling 1-800-444-1977.

Teaching Ideas
• What is Said’s explanation for why some people in the Mid-
dle East would be receptive to what he calls “demagogues”? Make a list of these grievances.
• Said, who himself is Palestinian by birth, claims that the United States supports Israeli settlements in violation of international law and U.N. reso-
nolutions. Have students use the internet or articles in this issue to identify which international laws and U.N. resolutions Said might be referring to.
• The title of this article is the “Root Causes of Terrorism.” Based on Said’s analysis, how would one attack the roots of terrorism? Are there other poss-
ible roots that Said does not mention?
Terrorism and Globalization

Teachers need to encourage students to ask the deep “why” questions.

BY BILL BIGELOW AND BOB PETERSON

The events of the past year have left us shaken: the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the declaration of war on terrorism, the bombing of Afghanistan, the anthrax scare, the erosion of civil liberties, and the prospect of endless war against enemies-to-be-named. Today’s world is a dangerous place, and our students know it.

The challenge for educators is not merely to describe these dangers, but to offer students the tools to help them explain today’s world — to help them acquire a critical global literacy. Because only explanation offers the hope of addressing root causes of social problems.

When it came to the horrific events of Sept. 11, both government and press demonstrated little curiosity about the circumstances that prompted the attacks or about the origins of Islamic fundamentalism. The position seemed to be that terrorism requires no explanation, it is simply an evil that needs to be crushed. True, major media printed occasional “Why do they hate us?” pieces — but these were few and far between. Even the best of these focused little on the circumstances that prompted the attacks or about the origins of Islamic fundamentalism.

Nor did government or press seek to establish a fuller definition of “terrorism” — one that might question whether government-promoted violence like U.S. sponsorship of the Nicaraguan Contras or support of the Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, might not count as “terrorism.” Also ignored was what might be considered corporate terrorism — for example, Texaco’s 20-year poisoning of Ecuador’s rainforests, or Union Carbide’s callous disregard for safety at its factory in Bhopal, India — site of the worst industrial accident in history.

FREE MARKET FUNDAMENTALISM

We believe that the violence of Sept. 11 and the continuing threats from fundamentalist-inspired terrorists are inexplicable without considering how profit-driven globalization is impacting cultures around the world. In fact, the writer Wendell Berry suggests that the global “free market” has become its own fundamentalism:

The “developed” nations [have] given to the “free market” the status of a god, and [are] sacrificing to it their farmers, farmlands, and communities, their forests, wetlands, and prairies, their ecosystems and watersheds. They [have] accepted universal pollution and global warming as normal costs of doing business.

But what is the relationship between free market fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism?

While scholarship linking globalization and terrorism is only beginning, it’s not too soon to suggest that economic upheavals created by globalization might lead to an unforeseen, but ferocious backlash.

For example, in a provocative Progressive magazine article called “The Mystery of Misogyny,” author Barbara Ehrenreich asks about the roots of Islamic fundamentalism’s deep hostility to women. She wonders if the answer might not lie in part in how Western cultural imagery, and you have the makings of what sociologist Arlie Hochschild has called a “global masculinity crisis.”

George Caffentzis links the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a political force in Egypt to “the impoverishment of urban workers and agriculturists. . . due to Structural Adjustment Programs and import liberalization.” He points out that “Islamic fundamentalism has distinguished itself, in addition to its unmitigated bolstering of patriarchal rule, for its attempt to win over the urban populations through the provision of some basic necessities such as schooling, healthcare, and a minimum of social assistance.”

Both government and press have demonstrated little curiosity about the circumstances that prompted the attacks or about the origins of Islamic fundamentalism.

The British warship Southampton sails along the Suez Canal in Ismailiya, 63 miles northeast of Cairo as an Egyptian fisherman prepares to begin fishing Saturday, Sept. 22, 2001.
Global economy is so disrupting the world, that many people’s allegiances and identities are dramatically shifting—and this is true not only for peasant and working classes, but for other social strata as well.

Vandana Shiva summarizes how she sees this process working:

Economic globalization is fueling economic insecurity, eroding cultural diversity and identity, and assuaging political freedoms of citizens. It is therefore providing fertile ground for the growth of fundamentalism and terrorism. Globalization fuels fundamentalism at multiple levels:

1. Fundamentalism is a cultural backlash to globalization as alienated and angry young men of colonized societies and cultures react to the erosion of identity and security.

2. Dispossessed people robbed of economic security by globalization cling to politicized religious identities and narrow nationalisms for security.

3. Politicians robbed of economic decision making as national economic sovereignty is eroded by globalization organize their vote banks along lines of religious and cultural difference on the basis of fear and hatred.

We agree with Shiva: “The war against terrorism” will not contain terrorism because it does not address the roots of terrorism. Tragically, the strategy of U.S. government and business leaders is more free market reform, more global trade, more privatization—this, of course, in addition to increased military and “security” spending, and an erosion of civil liberties. We are more than skeptical about this alleged route to peace and security.

Teachers need to enlist our students in a deep inquiry about the causes of terrorism, but more importantly, about building the kind of democratic society that can address those causes. Given the “you’re either with us or against us” ethos, asking students to think critically about these issues and to consider alternatives, can appear “unpatriotic.” In the post-Sept. 11 world, the pressures to conform to official stories have been intense. This simply makes it all the more important to urge students to search for the roots of global conflicts. Our teaching and our activism must insist, in writer Naomi Klein’s words, “that justice and equality are the most sustainable strategies against violence and fundamentalism.”

* Links to all the articles referred to here can be found at the website for the book Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World, www.rethinkschools.org/rp.

Bill Bigelow teaches at Franklin High School in Portland, OR. Bob Peterson teaches at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, WI. Both are editors of Rethinking Schools and the book, Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World. From which this article is excerpted.
Globalization. The word speaks to our growing interconnectedness. American teenagers wearing sneakers made in China; South Americans watching US television shows; internet messages flashing across continents. But this is only a partial view of our "global village." We are connected, but in very unequal ways — ways that pose dire threats to the health of the planet.

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