

# Child Soldiers

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STUDYGUIDE

## SYNOPSIS

**T**HIS DOCUMENTARY IS A TELLING GLOBAL EXPOSÉ OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE BECOME SOLDIERS, or have been through the trauma of soldiering, or who are presently engaged in fighting. Focusing on Uganda, Sudan, Burma, Colombia, and Sierra Leone, *Child Soldiers* examines the conditions that lead to such recruitment and gives voice to the experiences of numerous children who have witnessed violent atrocities or, in many more cases, been forced to enact brutality on behalf of adults.



In an effort to provide solutions to the crisis, the documentary includes interviews with United Nations representatives and Aid organizers who are trying to stop the abduction and coercion of children forced into military action.

What does this mean in the context of children and children's rights? How do children's vulnerabilities and dependencies on the adults around them influence their ability to stand up for their rights?

If necessary, establish the geographical relationships between Uganda, Sudan, Burma, Columbia, and Sierra Leone. Using a map or globe, orient students to the various regions featured in the film.



**CURRICULUM LINKS**

*Child Soldiers* has relevance for Sociology, Political Science, International Law, African and Latin American Studies, World History, and Child Welfare. This film is geared toward teachers and students of senior secondary and tertiary education as well as community and advocacy groups.

**BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM**

Provide some background on issues of human rights and the definition of an international war crime. Many of the concerns raised in the documentary are informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed in 1948. You might discuss with students how they define a fundamental 'human right.'

**GENERAL DISCUSSION POINTS**

As interviews with children from countries such as Sudan and Sierra Leone demonstrate, there are many risks for them as soldiers in rebel groups.

- Specifically, what are some of the many risks?
- In addition to the obvious use of violent force, what other tactics are used to ensure children's compliance? In particular, what rewards or pacifications are they offered?
- Why do children make 'good' recruits in the minds of commanders?

In exploring the reasoning of the commanders, it is worth stepping back and comparing our conceptions of childhood and youth with those conceptions held by rebel groups.

- What moral or ethical assumptions does our culture have in regard to children?
- What might be productive, and what might be limiting, in attempting to develop a 'universal' definition of childhood?
- How do Liberation Army commanders, such as Wol Arlec of the SPLA, defend the fact that children serve in their rebel forces? What justifications does he provide?
- Discuss some of the reasons why children join. What consequences do they face? What are some examples of the psychological and physical pressure they experience if they try to avoid recruitment? In the context of child soldiering, how do we define concepts such as 'agency,' 'consent,' and 'free choice?'
- According to Rachel Brett, the author of the *Child Soldiers Report*, a very conservative estimate is that there are 300,000 child soldiers around the world. Why is it that the *Report* uses such a conservative estimate?



- Which area of the world has the highest concentration of child soldiers?
- Which area is known to have the most atrocious and brutal instances of recruitment?

#### GENDER ISSUES

- Both boys and girls face the prospect of being forced into soldiering. What additional atrocities do girls face when rebel forces abduct them?
- What does it mean for a girl to 'be prepared'?
- How do the experiences of abducted girls illuminate the global problem of gender discrimination and gender-based violence?
- Several girls describe their experiences of pregnancy. What do you recall about their ordeals? Why might army commanders see pregnant girls as an 'asset'?

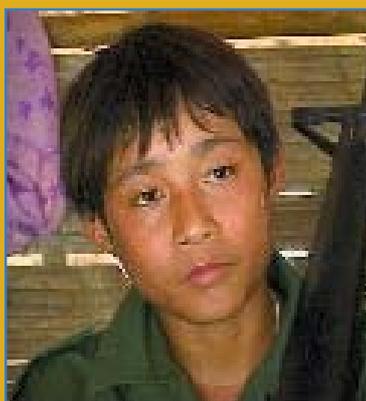
Previous Page: Sierra Leone - child soldier. Clockwise top left: Uganda - LRA escapee 'Richard' with father in Kitgum; Sudan - SPLA Cadres sitting down with RPG's; Sudan - SPLA child soldiers; Uganda - SPLA child soldier with gun; Uganda - LRA escapee 'Concy' in Kitgum



to their cause? How does the process of reproduction factor into other cycles discussed in the documentary?

**REHABILITATION**

- In addition to the International Rescue Committee, who helped set up KICWA, the rehabilitation camp, in Uganda?
- What kind of problems does this camp address? How?
- Along with telling their stories, what other activities do the children perform at KICWA as they try to emerge from the trauma of soldiering?
- What are some concrete examples they give when describing their efforts to escape the armies?
- Many children describe an endless cycle of abduction each time they escape an army. How does this add to their psychological problems? What can the rehabilitation workers do to address these problems?
- One boy moves to a temporary shelter. What ritual does he perform before entering the home?



**LONG-TERM EFFECTS AND REPATRIATION**

Many children who escape rebel groups continue to face obstacles as they attempt to re-integrate into their previous families and communities.

Discuss some of the specific comments made by children in the documentary. List examples of obstacles and difficulties.

'Hoh,' one of the children who escaped the army in Myanmar (Burma), describes his emotions while in the army. He says, 'I [felt] like a dead person.'

- In reflecting on this, as well as his other comments, what do you think the psychological and emotional state must be for a person in Hoh's position? What leads him to this state and what might draw him out of it?
- One of the rehabilitation activists explains that 'peace is an unknown word' to the children who have served as soldiers. What does she mean by this?
- We watch a Ugandan boy named Richard, who has escaped abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), as he returns to his family. Aside from the joy they experience, what other emotions do his relatives reveal as he rejoins them?
- Because the feelings are so strong on the part of Richard's family, what tradition do they break upon his return?
- Internalization of the oppressors' values is an obvious process for many child soldiers. What psychological reasons exist for children to avoid leaving their commanders even when they are persuaded to do so by Aid workers?

Once children are rescued by Aid organizations, often they cannot be returned to their families for fear that LRA forces will pick them up again.

- What are some other reasons why they might have problems returning home?
- What are the ramifications of these various problems?
- According to *Child Soldiers*, a number of children who have escaped the armies eventually join street gangs. Why is this the case?



Clockwise top left: Sudan - SPLA kids pre battle; Myanmar - Karen child soldiers marching; the next 3 photos from Colombia depict Ex FARC child soldiers in hiding; Myanmar - Karen child soldier with gun; Sudan - SPLA child soldiers before ambush; Sudan - child soldier with gun sitting at briefing; Sudan - SPLA soldier in Upper West Nile region

As part of initiatives made by the United Nations, recently soldiers have been given incentives to turn in their weapons.

- What are these incentives?
- Why do many children try to convince such agencies that they are adults?

In Sierra Leone, a number of children have been 'decommissioned' so that they might return home. The documentary shows many parents awaiting the arrival of these decommissioned children.

- What are your impressions of both groups, the children on one side of the wall and parents on the other?
- What difficulties confront these parents and children?

#### FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

Olara Otunnu, Special UN Representative of the Children and Armed Conflict, outlines three stages that need to be addressed in order to end the recruitment of children by rebel groups. The first stage is prevention, which involves establishing norms and standards of acceptable treatment of children and then bringing pressure to bear on governments and

rebel forces.

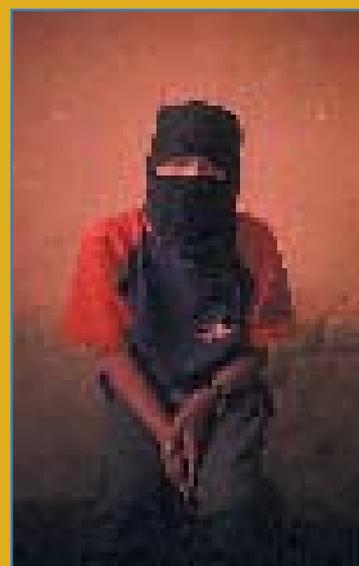
- What are the other two stages? Why are they important?
- What kind of organization is the United Nations Security Council? What function does it perform?

Bill Case, a member of the World Federalist Movement Coalition for the International Criminal Court, describes the current Security Council as an 'ad hoc volunteer fire department.'

- Why does he use this phrase?
- What kind of 'fire department' would he like to see?

Bill Case explains that he is lobbying for an International Criminal Court that 'recognizes the commanders who use child soldiers as perpetrators of 'crimes against humanity.'

- Despite the fact that this initiative has broad backing from the international community, which nation refuses to support it? Why?
- What are the policies regarding age and military recruitment in that country?
- What perspective do the adult soldiers who recall their earlier years serving in the Gulf War offer?
- How does this perspective pro-



vide new understanding when it comes to child soldiers in, say, Uganda or Colombia?

- What were the longer-range effects of serving in the military for these Gulf War soldiers upon their return? List some examples.

**NARROWING THE FOCUS: DISCUSSION POINTS ON INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES**

THIS SECTION FACILITATES IN-DEPTH CONVERSATION about one or more of the nations featured in *Child Soldiers*. It points to ways that students might extend their understanding of the problem by doing research in the library or on the web (see Internet links below). Specific questions related to the documentary are included so that students can continually return to the stories and concerns voiced in the film.

**UGANDA**

In the early 1950s, Uganda moved slowly away from British rule and toward post-colonial independence. After a great deal of inner turmoil, Milton Obote rose to power as Prime Minister. In 1964, he prevailed over an attempted mutiny by the military and in 1966, he orchestrated a *coup d'etat* against his own government. In the late 1970s, Obote was defeated in a coup staged by Idi Amin. In 1980, Uganda experienced a major turning point with its first democratic election, although that election occurred with possible ballot manipulation and controversy. Obote made a return by winning the election but soon faced a popular rebellion by the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni. The guerilla tactics used by the latter would eventually help him win what would later be named 'the war of the bush.' Museveni claimed power as President in 1986 and initiated the return of military rule. Since the seize of power by Amin in the 1970s, Uganda has had a very poor human rights record. Furthermore, between 1978 and 1988, an estimated 500,000 Ugandans fled to the Southern Sudan and thousands (possibly tens of thousands) of refugees from Sudan entered Uganda,



a trend that has fueled rather than rectified human rights violations.

- Specifically, what Ugandan economic and political conditions contribute to the problems children face, especially when under military duress?
- How do border crossings between Uganda and Sudan intensify violence and impact the living conditions of children?
- *Child Soldiers* suggests ways in which fighting actually hurts the people of the Lord's Resistance Army. Why would the LRA continue its practices even when there are clear costs?

**SUDAN**

Britain and Egypt controlled the country of Sudan until 1953 when an accord was signed that would gradually lead toward Sudan self-government. After intense internal strife that ended in a peace pact in 1972, Jaafer Mohammed al-Numeiry solidified his power as President. Much of the hostility on the part of the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army, which is made up mostly of Christians and animists (who believe that natural objects and phenomena possess spiritual consciousness), is directed at President Numeiry's 1983 decision to support Islamic Law. Students might use outside resources to study the underlying political and religious tensions that create conditions in which child soldiering is sanctioned and perpetuated. Possible questions include:

- The documentary mentions the civil war between the Black African South and the Arab North. Drawing on your own primary historical research, how did this war begin and why are sides drawn between South and North?
- What cultural and economic conflicts exist between and among Christian, animist, Muslim, and Jewish inhabitants of Sudan?
- What is the situation of refugees in Sudan and how might that lead to a national context in which children's rights and lives are not protected?
- How is the Sudan viewed by the West, and by US corporations in particular, and how might those views lead to a climate of non-intervention when it comes to the violation of children's rights?

**MYANMAR (FORMERLY BURMA)**

The Burmese won their independence from Britain in 1948. Fourteen years later, General Ne Win took over the country and attempted to launch a 'Burmese Path to Socialism.' In more recent decades, a violent regime known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has been in power, finding itself at odds with National League for Democracy. Elections took place in 1990 and, although the SLORC was defeated by 80 per cent of the vote, it refused to relinquish power. In 1997, the SLORC was disbanded and replaced with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which is under the same leadership. Border tensions between Myanmar and Thailand in the 'Golden Triangle' have become particularly troubled since February 2001. These tensions, which have been fed by allegations and counter-allegations of heroin trafficking, have resulted in increased pressure on children to join military forces in Myanmar. Possible questions include:

- When did Burma become re-named Myanmar and why?
- What does drug traffic across borders between Myanmar and Thailand have to do with recruitment of child soldiers?



- The documentary mentions that there is ethnic strife within Myanmar, particular when it comes to the Karen people. What information can you find out about this ethnic minority and why does tension exist? What are some possible avenues toward defusing ethnic and nationalist hostilities in the 'Golden Triangle'?
- As indicated by 'Hoh,' one of the boys who escaped the KLNA in Myanmar, institutional education is not easy for escaped child soldiers. Why is this?
- Investigate the number of children who are used by the government in Myanmar compared to rebel groups like the Karen.

#### COLOMBIA

Since the 1950s, there has been an insurgent campaign to overthrow the Colombian government. This campaign escalated in the 1990s, partly as a result of the booming drug trade. FARC, the largest guerilla group in the Western hemisphere, began after 'a US-sup-

ported attack occurred on a Communist Party peasant cooperative' (according to the Center for International Policy's Colombia Project). Eighteen thousand members belong to FARC, which is active on almost seventy fronts. Colombia's second-largest rebel group is known as NLA (or ELN). The effects of activities by FARC and NLA, when combined with several smaller guerilla groups, have very disturbing ramifications for Colombian children. In 1993, 2,190 children died; this is an average of six children per day.

- Conduct outside research to find out how FARC is funded. What is its annual income?
- What relevance does the oil sector have for NLA.(ELN)?
- Colombia has a population of 35 million people. How many of these are children? What impact might this statistic have on child soldiering?
- According to the

documentary, why do FARC commanders refer to their child soldiers as their 'little bees'?

#### SIERRA LEONE

In 1960, when Sierra Leone gained independence, the country opted for a Parliamentary system within the British Commonwealth. A number of insurgencies and government turnovers occurred through the 1960s and 1970s. After several contestations of the one-party system in Sierra Leone, a multi-party democratic system was approved in 1991; however, in 1992, the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces staged a military coup. Later, the people democratically elected





President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. He was overthrown in 1997, and it took one year for him to be restored to the Presidency. In the midst of Kabbah's daunting task of restoring order to the war-torn land, guerilla forces have continued to raid villages in search of children to carry out rebel operations.

- Why do the terrorist groups prefer children rather than adults?
- Why is mutilation of children's limbs a particular problem in Sierra Leone?
- One Sierra Leone boy recounts a particularly horrific ritual in which he was asked to participate, involving his victim's heart and kidney. What was this ritual?
- What is the relationship between the guns and drugs provided to the children and the diamonds mined in Sierra Leone?

#### WESTERN COUNTRIES

It is also important to note that western countries also use child soldiers, for example, the British army recruited and trained sixteen-year-olds and sent them to the Gulf War at the age of seventeen and the IRA used children to plant bombs during the conflict in Northern Ireland.

- Investigate the use of children in armed conflict in the so-called developed world.

#### FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- In Uganda, at the Kitgum border, children who are leaving rehabilitation camps to return home are given 'Resettling Kits.' Use web or library resources to find out what a Resettling Kit contains. Come up with one or two items you would like to add to the kit and explain why.
- Conduct library or web research on an area not covered in the documentary which is known for its high concentration of child soldiers. Sri Lanka or the Philippines are two obvious choices. Compare and contrast this country with those emphasized in *Child Soldiers*.
- Think about a 14- or 15 year-old that you know, perhaps a relative, friend, or neighbor in your community. Now that you have seen the documentary, how would you explain the problems faced by child soldiers to him or her? What are the three or four most important points you want that person to know? Write an essay conveying those major points, keeping in mind that your reader is a teenager with little knowledge about the political problem.
- *Child Soldiers* mentioned the work of UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) on behalf of abducted children. Using the web, research the goals of UNICEF and

the actions it takes to achieve these goals. Then find at least four more organizations that are taking steps to help child soldiers. What are their 'mission statements' How are they implementing solutions? Is there anything reasonable and possible that your community can do to help one of these organizations?

- Organize a 'Red Hand Day' on the lawn of your school. As many students as possible will place 'red hands' made out of cardboard and sticks into the ground, in an effort to 'Stop the violence associated with child soldiering.' See [www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org) for more information.
- Pair up with a partner. Brainstorm about how you might organize and design a storybook that could be read worldwide by children ages seven-to-ten. What would your theme be? How would you convey that theme in story format? What kinds of pictures might you draw that would be age-appropriate while giving young readers a clear, accurate understanding of child soldiers' struggle to be free? Using basic art materials, create a children's story that you will share with the rest of the class.
- Collaborate with your classmates to build a standing display that will be located in a central area of your school. Develop charts, diagrams, and banners that will attract the attention of your schoolmates. Find still or video images that illustrate the problem. Highlight several simple solutions that might move your classmates into action.
- If you were a member of the United Nations, how would you try to solve the problem currently posed by the fact that one nation refuses to support the initiative that would allow commanders to be prosecuted for 'crimes against humanity'? Is it possible to devise a strategy that would resolve the problems for those on either side of the issue? Or, along different lines, can you think of a way to convince the two countries to offer their support? Write a speech that you would like to make to the

United Nations, in which you outline your argument and articulate your position on child soldiering.

#### INTERNET RESOURCES

**Amnesty International, Australia Chapter**  
[www.amnesty.org.au/whats happening/children/hrd4-3.html](http://www.amnesty.org.au/whats happening/children/hrd4-3.html)

**Freynework Justice Issues web site**  
[www.freynework.com.au/justice/index.html](http://www.freynework.com.au/justice/index.html)

**World Vision Australia Child Labor**  
[www.worldvision.com.au/getinvolved/advocacy/child\\_soldiers.asp](http://www.worldvision.com.au/getinvolved/advocacy/child_soldiers.asp)

**Australian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**  
[www.ozoneonline.com.au/child-soldiers/csoldiers.htm](http://www.ozoneonline.com.au/child-soldiers/csoldiers.htm)

**Child Soldiers Global Report 2001, East Timor Chapter**  
[www.tip.net.au/~wildwood/01/junchild.htm](http://www.tip.net.au/~wildwood/01/junchild.htm)

**International Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers**  
[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)

**International Save the Children Alliances**  
[www.savechildren.or.jp/alliance](http://www.savechildren.or.jp/alliance)

**Child Rights Information Network**  
[www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)

**Child Soldiers Information Page, Focus on Sierra Leone**  
[www.euronet.nl/~p\\_sterk/childsol.htm](http://www.euronet.nl/~p_sterk/childsol.htm)

**Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Children and Armed Conflict**  
[www.un.org/special-rep/children\\_armed\\_conflict/fsoldiers.html](http://www.un.org/special-rep/children_armed_conflict/fsoldiers.html)

**African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect**  
[www.africaonline.co.ke/anppcan/](http://www.africaonline.co.ke/anppcan/)

**Child Protection in the Philippine Resource Network**  
[www.childprotection.org.ph](http://www.childprotection.org.ph)

**Child Soldiers of LTTE Tamil Tiger Terrorists in Sri Lanka**  
[www.spur.asn.au/childwar.htm](http://www.spur.asn.au/childwar.htm)

**The Burma Project**  
[www.soros.org/burma/index/html](http://www.soros.org/burma/index/html)

**Center for International Policy's Colombia Project**  
[www.ciponline.org/colombia](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia)

**Sudan Page**  
[www.sudan.net](http://www.sudan.net)

#### ABOUT THE WRITER

Christina Lane is Assistant Professor at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, FL. She is the author of the book, *Feminist Hollywood: From Born in Flames to Point Break* (2000).

#### CHILD SOLDIERS

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Andrew Ogilvie is available to speak about *Child Soldiers* at your school or university. To make a booking please visit The Speakers Bureau at: [www.metromagazine.com.au](http://www.metromagazine.com.au)

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