

## Lesson Plan: CHILDREN AT WAR

### Teacher Key

As the students refer to the readings, have them answer the following questions (either in small groups or individually). Possible answers are provided, but the link to UNICEF will significantly deepen your knowledge.

- What could be the reasons that children, as opposed to adults, are chosen for combat?

*Children tend to have boundless energy that can be helpful in physically exhausting combat situations; children are typically more aggressive and quicker to react than adults, which can be useful in battle; they usually defer to authority and take orders easily; younger children do not have as well developed consciences as most adults, and therefore are less inclined to feel guilt or remorse about injuring or killing another; children's personalities are not yet fully formed, so they can be molded in a way that military leaders find valuable.*

- What circumstances in a society might lead children into combat situations?

*The breakdown of family structures due to war, violence or poverty can lead children to find sustenance and a sense of belonging in the armed forces; military leaders sometimes use force or coercion to "recruit" children from schools and their families; ongoing and deeply-rooted hostilities, such as those in Northern Ireland or Palestine, can cause children to feel obligated to either exact revenge against an enemy or honor one's religion or family in battle.*

- What do you imagine might be some of the consequences to children who do take part in war?

*As it is for adults, children can suffer acute psychological problems as a result of the trauma of combat. Children's minds, though, can be more resilient (like their bodies) than those of adults, and so once in a stable and supportive environment, the child can begin to heal. Yet children can experience profound damage to their fragile psyches, and as they search for ways outside the battlefield to cope with the physical and mental pain resulting from combat, they can lash out violently, experience deep depression or fall prey to substance abuse.*

- In most states in the U.S., once 16 years old, children can legally work, drive or leave school; they may not, however, vote until 18 or drink alcohol until 21. If the U.S. were to adopt an official policy of having children at 16 serve in combat, while maintaining the current voting and drinking age, how would you respond? If the voting and drinking ages were lowered to 16 as well, would you be more likely to support the policy of using children in combat?

Discuss the responses as a class.