

Kyle Yrigoyen
English 112B
Dr. Warner
Fall 2009

The Effect of War on Youth

I. Rationale: In the last sixty years, indeed the last century-and-a-half, our world has experienced and endured some of the most frightening displays of human behavior and capacity for destruction through the institution of warfare. Seldom do we realize, though, how close this fact of human affairs is to our everyday lives until either some tragic moment occurs in our own lives or in the lives of those around us. In this unit-of-study, I focus on history and history makers in general, and the effects of war on youth in particular, through the lens of young people in wartime America WW II to present.

II. Launching the Unit

Lead-in: Via music, and video if available.

- “War” (What is it Good For?) performed by Edwin Starr <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01-2pNCZiNk> written by [Norman Whitfield](#) and [Barrett Strong](#)
- *I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag* written and performed by Joseph Allen “Country Joe” McDonald <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBdeCxJmcAo><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBdeCxJmcAo>
- “Warrior” performed by Kid Rock <http://nationalguardwarrior.com/>
- If the technological resources are available, show the video from McDonald's Woodstock performance.

a. Provide students with copies of the lyrics to each song. Encourage students to analyze the lyrics with helping questions: What do the songs mean? How might the songs be influential to the way we view or perceive war?

b. Split the class into two groups: pro-war and anti-war. Working from self to group, have each student write his or her reasons, then reflect amongst the group, and finally have a spokesperson from each groups share views regarding war. This is not meant to be a debate as of yet.

III. Poems on War from Soldiers

Close reading, analysis, and discussion of “Young Men” by Curt Bennett.

In quiet dignity they trudge
With only the slurping sounds
Of jungle boots sucking mud
As they carry their burden
Of expendable youth at war.
There is a poise about them,
A quality not found in peers,
A bearing common only
To young men in combat.

There is a stoic resignation,
A façade of wary acceptance,
A weariness in their movements
As they slowly walk the war.
Struggling with all its elements,
And inside, struggling with themselves,
For just below the surface,
They keep the well-known secret,
The haunting cowardice common to all.

Twenty-four hours a day they walk the line,
Living up to the reputation,
Assuming the swagger, the hard line,
Their casual indifference to death
That masks that deep seeded fear of dying,
The overwhelming urge to break and run,
The paralyzing instinct to freeze or hide!
Praying silently in secret
That whatever happens they won't look bad.

And that is why they are at war,
Where they would rather be
Then face the shame of not going,
Of being accused of not having "it",
To uphold that fragile concept of honor,
With their reputations on the line.
And they proudly carry their reputations,
For that is all that remains of their dignity,
Even if it means they must die for it.

Online resources:

- War Poetry: A website with poems about war by the soldiers who fought in those wars. <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/> - See especially “Vietnam Poetry” from Curt Bennett, <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/vietnam.htm#YOUNG%20MEN>, e.g., the poem “Young Men”.

a. Questions for discussion: Using the poem as a platform, how is war described? What sentiments does the poet express?

IV. Center Piece: Soldier Boys by Dean Hughes

This book offers the unique elements of blending historical facts with the fictitious experiences of two young soldiers on opposing sides in WW II. Spenser Morgan, a young American from Utah, and Deiter Hedrick a young German raised in the Hitler youth, now soldier in Hitler's Army, see what war is truly about. Told from the perspectives of both young men, this work will allow readers to explore the reality and cruelty of war, while at the same time coming to an understanding that war is ultimately fought between humans, typically people just as similar as we are in our everyday lives.

V. Finale – Movie “The Deer Hunter”

- How does the war affect these small-town boys? How does it change their lives forever?
- SSW Activity

VI. Extending the Unit:

Comparing our studies of the past with the lessons of today and tomorrow:

- A look at our present situation, a country at war.
- The impact of 9/11.
- The “war on terrorism”.

9/11 Poem from London

Tomorrow, it will all run backwards.

The steel tsunamis will froth back upwards

And become solid.

The planes will be pulled out like javelins

And slide backwards, swallowing their vapour trails.

Tomorrow, everyone will be fine.

Tomorrow, everyone who died will come home.

They will sit again at the tables of home

And rejoin life's fellowship, its snapshots, tea

And picnics.

Tomorrow, all will be well.

Everyone will sleep as babies do under mobiles,

Untroubled by strange sounds, of aero engines

Flying too low and shadows over the streets.

Tomorrow, mobile phones will be just toys again.

The sky will be clear, blue, unbroken.

Michael Brett December 2009

Films

- Jarhead
- Fog of War (Documentary featuring Robert McNamara)
- Brotherhood (new 2009)
- Born on the 4th of July directed by Oliver Stone

Books

- After the First Death by Robert Cormier
- Born on the 4th of July by Ron Kovic

VII. Works Cited

“War” Edwin Starr

“I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag” by Country Joe McDonald

“Warrior” by Kid Rock

“Young Men” by Curt Bennett 2003

“9/11 Poem from London” by Michael Brett December 2009

Soldier Boys by Dean Hughes. Atheneum, 2001.