

# Are We Born to Bully?

## From the Playground to the Battlefield



THE PLAYGROUND



THE BATTLEFIELD

**A Special Curriculum For Young People  
To Help Them Understand  
What Prevents Peace**

**FOR AGES 11-14**

**by  
Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle  
with Adryan Russ**

**based on the  
Education For Peace Series books by  
Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle**



## Special Thanks and Credits

To Dr. Marvin Garbeh Davis, the courageous Liberian peace educator and now the Atrium Society Director of Peace Education for West Africa, who has helped more than 5,000 Liberian children of war understand and resolve conflict peacefully.

To Adryan Russ, our exceptionally gifted literacy artist, who has assisted us in creatively crafting our programs for more than twenty-five years. We thank you, and the children and their parents and teachers thank you.

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# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Special Thanks and Credits	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Activities	v
<b>An Important Note to Teachers</b>	vii
<b>THE FIGHT INSIDE US</b>	
Lesson 1: Learning to Understand What Prevents Peace	2
Lesson 2: When There's Conflict, There's A Reason	11
Lesson 3: Conflict Comes From Conditioning	24
Lesson 4: The Fight Inside Is the One That Needs to Stop	36
<b>OUR CONDITIONING IS BASED ON FEAR</b>	
Lesson 5: Peace Calls for Transformative Insight	52
Lesson 6: Our Conditioning Is Based on Fear	62
Lesson 7: Fear Is What Leads to Conflict	76
Lesson 8: Respect Is the Act That Conquers Fear	96
<b>FEAR COMES FROM OLD INSTINCTS</b>	
Lesson 9: Enemies and Heroes: Why Do We Need Them?	114
Lesson 10: Ethnocentrism: Ancient Instincts Can Trigger Dangerous Messages	131
Lesson 11: Are Our Brains Hardwired for War?	143
<b>UNDERSTANDING WHAT PREVENTS PEACE</b>	
Lesson 12: Seeing Through the Eyes of Peace	156
Lesson 13: Communicating Without Fighting	172
Lesson 14: Earthlings: A Global Village for Peace	182
<b>The Importance of Reading</b>	200

## LIST OF ACTIVITIES

<b>Activity 1A: Story: There's A Fight!</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Activity 1B: Think I'm A Bully!</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Activity 1C: My Bully Words!</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Activity 1D: I Have Physical Skills</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Activity 1E: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Activity 2A: Roleplay: Can I Stop This Bully?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Activity 2B: Roleplay: I'm Protecting Myself!</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Activity 2C: Using Both Physical and Mental Skills</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Activity 2D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Activity 3A: My Mind Is on Overload!</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Activity 3B: Story: The Test of the Wild Horse</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Activity 3C: It Hurts!</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Activity 3D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Activity 4A: Roleplay: Clearing the Clouds</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Activity 4B: Roleplay: Fighting for Freedom</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Activity 4C: Roleplay: I Don't Fight!</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Activity 4D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Activity 5A: Tug of Peace</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Activity 5B: Roleplay: Let's Make A Deal</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Activity 5C: Mukuso: The Movie in My Mind</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Activity 5D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Activity 6A: My Zombie Zone!</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Activity 6B: Roleplay: I'm A Creature of Habit</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Activity 6C: My "Caught in Thought" Tree</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Activity 6D: Conflict Situation: My Undoing!</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Activity 6E: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Activity 7A: Story: Through the Eyes of Peace</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Activity 7B: I Belong to a Group!</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Activity 7C: Story: The Butter Battle by Dr. Seuss</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Activity 7D: Roleplay: We Are Better!</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Activity 7E: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Activity 8A: If War Is the Answer, What's the Question?</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Activity 8B: Dramatic Changes</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Activity 8C: Pick a Strip: Stop! Listen! Act!</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Activity 8D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>109</b>

<b>Activity 9A: Story: The Bad Guys</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Activity 9B: Roleplay: Is War a Game?</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Activity 9C: Panel: Truth and Image!</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Activity 9D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Activity 10A: Roleplay: The Image of a Threat</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Activity 10B: Panel: I Recognize That Belief!</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Activity 10C: Let's Build a Freedom Fighter!</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Activity 10D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Activity 11A: Story: The Littlest Warrior</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Activity 11B: Words That Create War</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Activity 11C: Roleplay: Biological Bullies!</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Activity 11D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Activity 12A: I See! I Imagine!</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Activity 12B: Roleplay: Stop! Think!</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Activity 12C: Story &amp; Panel: My Proprioception Makes Waves!</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Activity 12D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Activity 13A: Panel: I Am Awake!</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Activity 13B: My Medium Has a Message</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>Activity 13C: Roleplay: The Truth About Images</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>Activity 13D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Activity 14A: Pick a Strip: The Stages of My Personal Environment</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Activity 14B: Story: I Will fight No More, Forever</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Activity 14C: Peace in an Instant!</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Activity 14D: A Quote to Note</b>	<b>198</b>

## AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO TEACHERS

“Most honest combat vets will tell you, perhaps not eloquently but in their own way, the same thing: essentially that combat is in our human DNA and demands to be exercised.... The question is, can we humans evolve peacefully, or will we succumb to instincts we can't transcend?”

— *Former Marine Corp helicopter pilot in Vietnam*

In today's world, there are bullies everywhere – at home, at school, in offices, among nations. There are ongoing attempts to stop the fighting, stop battles, and stop wars, yet they still go on. The question we need to ask not only your students, but also yourself, is: “What creates these battles? Is the cause of it outside ourselves – with the “enemy” – “them”– or does the battle begin in the brain, my brain?” Once we understand how fights begin, where they start – we can stop them.

The truth is that the only way to prevent wars from happening is to begin inside ourselves – to actually see the cause of this battle in our brain in the way we have been conditioned to think. The images of the “enemy” comprise the prejudicial conditioning thinking that creates war inside us —it divides us into opposing ideologies, each thinking that ours is the right and just one. This is also based on images we have of ourselves — that we need to identify with a particular tribe such as American, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, French, Japanese, Russian, Catholic, English, Irish, North and South Korean and on and on – all labels, images that we believe are real, that we believe are true – that we believe will provide us physical and psychological security. It's who we think we are and who we think others are in relationship to our self-images that divide and fragment the human race and therefore create conflict.

When the human race — which is one people, one whole — is fragmented in this way, it's in conflict. And the source of this divisive conditioning comes from our primitive brain's reaction to feeling a threat to its survival, that we need to belong to a particular group for safekeeping and anyone outside this group is a threat to this safe haven, this security.

But these images, these tribal identities, are an illusion. We make them up. Thinking that we are these fragments, we are asleep. We are deluded into thinking that we are these images, these collective personalities. These tribal ideologies that we think will give us security are actually preventing it. The world being divided in this way can never be whole, can never cooperate

for the whole of humanity, as it should for the survival of all rather than the select few — based on survival of the fittest, and that the strongest will dominate and survive.

We therefore see bullying as paradoxically necessary for our survival. Anyone within the group who seems weak becomes a threat to the survival of the group and is perceived as someone who needs to be eliminated — or bullied — out of the group. We shun, we intimidate, we bully all in the misguided name of survival.

### **Something To Consider**

Susan Gingras Fitzell asks in her book *Free the Children: Conflict Education for Strong Peaceful Minds*, she writes based on evidence from neuroscientific research in the article “Child Warriors: Are We Priming Our Children’s Brains for Violence?”:

- Are children being exposed to violence on TV and through playing violent video games, setting up an environment that physically changes the brain by making it good at thinking and acting violently?
- Can this then increase the possibility that the next generation of children will inherit a brain adapted physically to warlike behavior?

In this curriculum we are also asking: “Is this genetic programming created by the constant exposure to visual violence only symptomatic of something far deeper and more pervasive, which has been going on for thousands of years?”

According to the neuroscientists stated in this article, the violent influence of the media physically changing the brain to make it better at thinking and acting violent and these changes can affect the next generation genetically in the same way. This is nothing new. It has been going on for millennia based on the survival of the fittest instinctive competitiveness to get one’s physical needs met over “the enemy”— those who pose a threat to our group’s continued existence.

This biological genetic preparation for combat based on this misguided survival instinct has been programmed into the brain. It is compelled to keep this primitive hardwired program primed and ready to ensure its continued existence. The conditioned image of “the enemy” is solidly in place due to the constant reinforcement it has received over time. This image creates what you could call a biological self-defense blueprint, like a computer database, that

over time has created an inborn or inherited pattern in the brain's physical structure in order to feel protected and to therefore ensure its survival.

This primitive compulsion to fight for “our” survival is now being reinforced by the media with the violence we see on TV and in video war games. It's being programmed into the brain through constant reinforcement. This constant bombardment of violent images creates the need in many young people to want to learn how to prepare themselves for combat – to protect themselves and their families and country from the “enemy” – for they see the potential for war all around them and so to them they are justifiably preparing themselves for this probable outcome. For them the possibility of war is very real, so for them, playing violent video games is a necessary prerequisite for combat. The illogicality of this reaction is that the brain is mistakenly recreating this defense system by reacting to these violent media images as if they were real — as actual threats when they are not. This is the key to unlocking the hardwired program — seeing the image as false, as made-up.

In general the main objective in teaching this curriculum is to bring awareness to the role that psychological and biological conditioning play in creating conflict. The process in teaching this is to understand the essential characteristics that make it possible for young people to grasp what this means — in their own lives and in the world. The first one is to help your students ask questions and think for themselves — questioning that is cohesive and consistent, that addresses conditioning as the source of conflict.

**What this curriculum is asking,  
that goes beyond this generalization of random self-inquiry,  
is that the right questions be asked, at the right depth,  
and in the right developmental sequence leading the student  
to be able to understand the role of conditioning  
in creating conflict and hence preventing peace.**

At that critical point, the curriculum then assists them in making the connection with how conditioning occurring in their lives is, in fact, the incipient stage of conditioning that creates conflict in the world in what we call war — that we are the world and the world is us, that what we do at any stage of human development is responsible for what happens in the world.

**Students need to associate  
bullying on the playground with bullying on the battlefield –  
that they are founded on the same survival reactions,  
that their basic primitive drives are essentially the same.**

Too often understanding human conflict has been conventionally addressed in a remedial, reactive way — through therapeutic or moralistic means in individual conflicts, or through diplomatic or political intervention, as in the case of social conflict, or through judicial or military intervention.

**The intent of this curriculum is to end conflict from conditioned thinking *immediately* — as it happens, in each and every moment.**

With the right kind of education this maladjusted biological program can be seen for what it is – and in that intentional awareness it can be brought to a state of abeyance through the awakening of intelligence.

### **Preparing To Teach Each Lesson**

In addition to the activities laid out in this curriculum, we would like to suggest that you:

- 1) Be sure to read ahead before working on each lesson. There may be some preparation you'll need to do before each one.
- 2) Provide homework for your students, so that they practice the skills they are learning.
- 3) Ask them to explore their school, their homes, their community for groups that may be participating in bully-like behavior.
- 4) Encourage students to talk about such situations openly, so that they can be dealt with.
- 5) Ask students to bring to class an idea of a hero, or an enemy — from a magazine story, or a local story they've heard. Explore with them why they see this person as a hero, or enemy.
- 6) No student should be made "wrong" for his or her opinion. The idea is to bring up topics and talk them out.
- 7) Have them watch a violent video game such as Call to Duty\* or any of the current popular video war games and have them discuss what they really see and feel.

\* Call of Duty sold \$775 million dollars in five days. The Call of Duty franchise has surpassed the \$6 billion mark in sales as of June 2012.

- 8) Ask them if they feel a need, after watching these kinds of videos, to get ready for combat to defend themselves, their families and their nation?
- 9) Ask then if they think the violent images in these games are real to them or are they just images.
- 10) Ask them to design a video game that helps young people see through the violent images, to see that what they see in these videos is not real — only images.
- 11) Ask them why they think adults make these violent videos.