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Teaching Peace In a Time of War

A decade of civil war cost the lives of more than 250,000 people in the former Yugoslavia. The children of this region have been irrevocably afflicted by this violence. Can Hetty van Gorp help teach the language of peace to a generation of kids who have known only war?

Meet the students and teachers at Vasa Pelagic School in Belgrade, Serbia. The pupils include Nenad, whose father has been institutionalized for killing the child's mother, and Emil, who is terrorized for being a Muslim. Their classmate Aleksandra, whose father admits that he "enjoyed" the war, says, "Peace means nothing to me, because I don't have any peace."

We witness small triumphs, like the progress of Nenad and of student representative Gordana, who helps organize the school's first-ever dance. **Teaching Peace in a Time of War** offers a sense of optimism that even schools in the most troubled circumstances can become beacons of peace.

Directed by: Teresa MacInnes
Written by: Ema Buffie and Teresa MacInnes
Cinematography: Kent Nason
Picture Editing: Teresa MacInnes and John Brett
Sound Editor: Alex Salter
Sound Recordist: Arthur McKay
Original Music: Bilja Krstic
Producers: Kent Martin (NFB) and Peter d'Entremont
(Triad Teaching Peace Productions Ltd.)

A co-production of the National Film Board of Canada
and Triad Teaching Peace Productions Ltd.

54 MINUTES

Teaching Peace
In a Time of War



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A decoder is required.



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The Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia was composed of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia. Communist leader Josip Broz Tito ruled the federation until his death in 1980. Yugoslavia remained unified until the early 1990s, when it started to unravel under the rule of Slobodan Milosevic. Devastating wars and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and the autonomous province of Kosovo have left Serbia and Montenegro as the two remaining republics in the former Yugoslav federation.

As **Teaching Peace in a Time of War** demonstrates, youth in Serbia have been deeply affected by a decade of war in a region characterized by long simmering hostilities and deep rifts along lines of ethnicity, citizenship, religion and class. As you will see in this film, many of these youth have become disheartened and embittered, and there is a great need to break the cycle of intolerance and violence.

We witness the beginning of a journey of transformation at Vasa Pelagic, a school of 1,200 students on the outskirts of Belgrade, Serbia. Over a two-year period, Hetty van Gorp of Peaceful Schools International helped lead a number of initiatives at the school. All are aimed at helping students and staff develop strategies and skills to prevent violence and to resolve conflict peacefully.

Directed by award-winning filmmaker Teresa MacInnes, this video is essential viewing for those who want to contribute to making our schools safer and more peaceful.

Pre-Viewing Questions

Here are a few questions for teachers and students to keep in mind while viewing this video.

- Is there a need to teach peace in schools?
- How do the situations faced by Serbian teachers and students compare to those in your school?
- Can prejudice be “untaught”?
- How can we, as individuals, promote a more peaceful future?

Post-Viewing

As you may have noticed, there are certain commonalities when we teach peace. UNICEF defines peace education as:

The process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about the behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create conditions conducive to peace, whether at a personal, interpersonal, inter-group, national, or international level.

The students at Vasa Pelagic are gradually introduced to the basic concepts of peace education. They have learned skills for resolving their own conflicts. They have also begun a student parliament where they are encouraged to listen to the views of others in a non-judgmental manner, while putting into practice the democratic model of decision-making.

Sound Recorder: Arthur McKay
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Questions for Educators

1. Do you think that peace education will make a positive impact on students such as Aleksandra (the girl who wants to become a lawyer) and Nenad (the boy who lives with his uncle because his father killed his mother)? Discuss.
2. How can Emil (the Muslim boy whose dog was killed) deal peacefully with the overt bigotry that he encounters in his own neighbourhood?
3. What must change to break the cycle of ethnic intolerance and hatred faced by some of these youth?
4. Peter Duffy, the Canadian journalist, believes that Serbian children would be better off if they were all sent to Canada. Nena replies, “If you want to be sure something is like this or like that, you have to come and see.” What do you think is informing the opinion of the journalist? What do you think of Nena’s assertion?
5. Aleksandra says, “War is not going to bring anything good.” Her father, who fought for Serbia, says he “enjoyed” the war. What can prevent Aleksandra from adopting her father’s opinion?
6. Will anything in this film affect your life or work? How?

Questions for Youth

1. The history of the Balkans is complex. After viewing the video, do some research to better understand the origins of the Balkan wars. Try to uncover the roots of the deep ethnic rift that contributed to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.
2. How did this video affect you?
3. Do you think that Aleksandra is right when she says that peace is not possible? Discuss.
4. Do you think schools should teach peace? Explain. What would contribute to peace education at your school?
5. How would you define diversity? Based on your definition, does your school have a diverse population? If so, does your school meet the needs of all of its students when it comes to creating a peaceful environment and ensuring respect? How? If not, in what ways could it improve?
6. Do you think Aleksandra will succeed in becoming a lawyer? Discuss.
7. What needs to happen so that Emil (the boy whose dog was killed) can live his life free from prejudice?
8. Does this kind of prejudice exist where you live? If so, how does it affect you?
9. What can you do to create a more peaceful future?