

Building peace

Theme: Children in conflict, peace building

Country focus: Angola

Aim: To reflect on how war affects children and can stop their education
To encourage children to be thankful for opportunities that peace brings.

Materials/preparation:

- The *Building Peace* presentation available to download from www.christianaid.org.uk/learn
- Brief another member of staff to have a mock argument with you at the beginning of the assembly.
- Play a song about peace as children enter the hall, e.g. 'Give Peace a Chance' by John Lennon and show the title slide (slide 1) of the PowerPoint presentation.

Assembly presentation

Welcome the pupils into assembly in your normal way, then begin to have a mock argument with another member of staff. For example the other teacher could interrupt you and say, 'Hey stop! It's MY turn to do the assembly today. I want to talk to the children!'

Continue like this briefly and then turn to the children and ask if they can help you sort out the problem? Take their advice and resolve the disagreement (perhaps agreeing that the other teacher will take the next assembly).

Tell the children that for most of us, these kinds of conflicts are easy to sort out and that we are living in mostly peaceful times in our country. But in some countries the arguments between groups of adults don't get sorted out easily and sometimes people take up weapons and war breaks out. We're going to hear a story about one boy whose life was changed by war.

Eduardo's story

Display slide 2: Eduardo Chiwila

Eduardo Chiwila is 12 years old and lives in Angola, a country in southern Africa. His village is called Munhena, but he's only lived there for two years.

Display slide 3: Painting by John Keane of a child in the forest.

Before that Eduardo lived with his family in the forest. Why? Because they were running away from the fighting and the forest was the safest place to hide.

Angola was at war for many years and many people like Eduardo had to run from their homes and live out in the open, moving from place to place. The people ended up miles and miles away from their own villages. (People who have been forced to leave their homes are called 'internally displaced people' or 'internal refugees'.)

This is how Eduardo describes his life in the forest: 'We were always running and trying to escape from the war. We didn't have any food, shelter, blankets, tents – nothing. We lived like that for one or two years and soldiers would chase us. One time we hid in the river to escape. I didn't like living like that because I was always afraid I was going to die and I was always hungry. We had to scavenge for food and whenever we heard there was any cassava [a bit like sweet potato] nearby we would start walking to that place and digging for the roots to eat. I was so happy when the war finished because we could leave the forest.'

Display slide 4: Eduardo outside his home.

When the war in Angola finally ended, Eduardo and his family were able to move out of the forest and find a better place to live. But many of the villages in Angola had been destroyed during the war and people had very little to go back to and very few belongings. Eduardo and his family moved to a new village and built themselves a new home using tree branches and mud.

Display slide 5: Eduardo carrying branches.

Although Eduardo was 10 when he came out of the forest, he had never been to school. During times of conflict, normal life stops and children are often the ones who miss out the most. So once he arrived in the village, Eduardo began to go to school. But there was a problem – they had no building! The school had to meet outdoors under the trees whatever the weather. As Eduardo says ‘The sun makes my eyes hurt and when it rains we either run home or wait under the branches for it to stop. It’s not very good when you and all your notebooks get wet.’

Display slide 6: People building the school.

Now Eduardo is helping to build his school alongside many other adults and children in the village. A local organisation called IECA (Angolan Congregational

Church), which is funded by Christian Aid, helped the villagers plan where and how to build the school. Now there is peace, people know that the soldiers won’t be coming anymore. They know that they can build homes and a school because no one is going to destroy them. They no longer have to run from place to place. They can go to sleep at night with a roof over their head.

Eduardo knows now that he will be able to study now that there is peace and is making plans for the future.

‘I hope to continue with my studies and eventually go to the secondary school in Mavinga, a nearby town. When I finish school I’d like to be a teacher or a driver. I’d love to be able to drive my parents back to their home village.’

Reflection

Ask the pupils to close their eyes and think of a situation they know of where there's conflict, such as an argument with a friend or parent or a world situation they know of. Ask them to imagine what they could do to help sort the conflict out and to think about it all being dealt with. Then ask them to visualise Eduardo returning to his village and rebuilding his school and how he might have felt.

Prayer

Dear God

Thank you for peace in our lives. Thank you for peace in our school and in our country. We pray for children who live in places where there is fighting. And we remember children like Eduardo who have to escape or hide from wars. Help us to be peacemakers ourselves in our homes and at school. Amen

Action

Here are some ideas to take the theme of this assembly further:

- Show children the online exhibition 'Children in Conflict' by artist John Keane at www.christianaid.org.uk/issues/conflict/childreninconflict/gallery.aspx The children could make their own paintings on the theme of 'Building peace'. Display the paintings as a gallery and invite parents to a 'private view' where they can buy their children's art work for a donation to Christian Aid.
- Find out more stories of children affected by conflict at www.globalgang.org. Search under 'conflict'.
- Discuss the ways you deal with conflict in your school. What could children do further? Design and create leaflets to show children what to do to resolve conflict in your school.