



Journeys in the Spirit

White feather stories

Resource 1



Getting ready – more background

This content has been adapted from QPSW's WWI Schools Resource, written by Don Rowe. This additional information has two purposes. Firstly, It is intended to help you feel more confident about the particular history of Quakers and the First World War. Secondly, it is meant to equip you with ideas and information to help you in conversation with children – answering questions, and giving explanations and helping children aged 5 – 12 learn about, explore and grapple with big questions. Whilst you are reading, think about how you might simplify language and explanations without losing meaning.

There was little to warn the people of Britain in 1914 that war was about to break out. It was a shock to everybody. At the beginning there was a huge rush to 'join up', and many young men were keen to fight 'for King and country'. However a significant number resisted the pressure to join the armed forces.

These people became known as conscientious objectors (COs), or 'Conchies'. There were several types of CO. Some were pacifists who were against war in general. Some were political objectors who did not consider the government of Germany to be their enemy. Some were religious objectors who believed that war and fighting were against their religion (mainly Quakers and Jehovah Witnesses). Others had reasons that were a combination of these.

Some felt they had to join the armed forces, but many decided they could not. Pacifist members of the No-Conscription Fellowship had successfully campaigned to secure 'the conscience clause' in the 1916 Conscription Act: the right to claim exemption from military service. Over 16,000 men made that claim. They were required to attend a tribunal (an interviewing panel with legal authority) to have the sincerity of their claims assessed. These tribunals were intended to be humane and fair. But it was left to local councils to choose the people who actually sat on the panels, and they often selected themselves. They were a mixed bunch: businessmen, shopkeepers, landowners, retired military officers, civil servants and the like. Most were also strongly patriotic and therefore prejudiced against anyone whom they thought was not. On each tribunal panel there was also one army-selected member, attending every hearing and with the right to cross-examine each applicant. These 'military representatives' had a common aim: to get as many men as possible into the army to fill the gaps left by the dead. The COs came from all walks of life, and varied widely in their ability to cope with often aggressive interviewers. Some didn't get a chance to say a word; others were able to explain a well-prepared argument. There were three categories recognised by the government's system:

- **Absolutists** – men who were categorically opposed to the war. These men were unwilling to perform any form of alternative non-combatant service that might aid the war effort.
- **Non-combatants** – men who would join the army but only if they were not trained to bear arms.
- **Alternativists** – men who would perform alternative work as long as it was outside of military control.

Those who were not believed were taken off to join the army. If they were believed, tribunals could give absolutists complete exemption from military service, but only a handful (around 300)

received full exemption. More common was to be offered a chance to work for the war in a way which avoided direct fighting. Many chose the Friends Ambulance Unit, founded by Quakers in 1914 (and re-founded by a committee of former members at the start of WWII). These COs were known as alternativists. Otherwise they took positions in the armed forces with non-fighting roles (non-combatants). Men who were not granted absolute exemption, but felt they could not do any work to help the war effort faced a hard moral choice. If they refused this option they were sent to prison. At the time of WWI no women were allowed to fight, but there were many ways in which women could support the war effort. Many young women without children went to work in the factories doing work previously done by the men, or signed up as nurses to help the war effort. There were medical corps in the army but as with the men, those who joined the Friends Ambulance Unit were able to offer care to anyone in need of it. For those married to COs, life could be very hard and many became social outcasts, often losing support of friends and family. *Resource 2* has three stories about people who followed their conscience, despite criticism and public pressure.



Journeys in the Spirit

White feather stories

Resource 2

Engage

Stories from WWI



Harry Stanton and Howard Marten

Harry Stanton lived in Luton. His father was a blacksmith. He adopted the Quaker view that war was wrong. He knew that most people thought differently but this did not seem to matter to him. He wrote that what people said in the street and in the papers made him stronger. Harry tried to persuade his friends not to join the army. They agreed with him that war was evil, but they thought that England had to fight the Germans and go to war.

In 1916, when Harry was a 21, he was conscripted, made to join the army. When he asked not to join the army he was told no, he had to go. He had just three minutes in a special 'court' to say why he didn't want to go. He was taken away by force to join the army, where he refused to obey orders. He, with others, was sent to prison.

After the authorities had tried to break the spirits of conscientious objectors (COs), or 'Conchies', who they had imprisoned, around fifty of them were taken from prison and sent to the Front Line, where the fighting was, in France, so that they would be said to be "on active service" and could be shot for disobedience. Harry and Howard Marten, who also had a Quaker background, were amongst them. Harry must have been prominent amongst the resisters because he and two or three others were taken to a special punishment unit for twenty-eight days. Harry described what happened next – a punishment known as 'crucifixion'. This involved being tied to a fixed object in a crucifixion pose and being left like this for up to two hours, with the punishment being repeated every day. *"... For those of us who were of average height the strain upon our arms was just bearable, though our wrists quickly became numbed, but for those who were shorter, the punishment was painful in the extreme."* After Harry had attempted to stand on some boards to stay out of the mud beneath their feet: *"We were ... placed with our faces to the wire of the inner fence and tied in the usual manner at the wrists and ankles. ... and I found myself drawn so closely into the fence that when I wished to turn my head I had to do so very slowly and cautiously to avoid my face being torn by the barbs."*

Howard Marten explained it afterwards: *"We were forever being threatened with the death sentence – over and over again – all done with the idea of intimidating us. The military authorities didn't know how to react...we weren't people that could be bullied into it...we were never prepared to do things in a military way. We never saluted anybody, we never stood to attention"*.

During much of this time they were locked up in cells, in awful conditions. They communicated through tiny holes in the wooden the walls, and some of the men held a Quaker meeting. At other times they sang. The spirit and determination of Harry, Howard and the others held up, but then they were marched off under armed guard to the front line. This is how Howard remembered it.

"After a wait of probably three-quarters of an hour, soldiers began forming themselves in a huge square – several thousand were present. When an appropriate hush had been arranged the sentence was read out ... 'The sentence of the court is to suffer death by being shot.' Then there

was a suitable pause. And one thought 'Well that's that...' But subsequently commuted to penal servitude [hard labour] for ten years.' And that was that."

The authorities had stepped back from the idea that any good would come from executing the COs. Political pressure in Britain, and the support from groups like the No Conscription Fellowship, The Friends Service Committee and Fellowship of Reconciliation, meant that the authorities were put off from giving them death sentences. When the COs were brought home a British crowd pelted them with eggs and tomatoes and they were split up and sent to various jails. Harry was sent to a special camp in Scotland where the men were put to work breaking rocks which could be used, for example, in road building. After a while Harry thought that even this was wrong and he should not do anything which might release other men to go and fight. As a result, he was sent back to prison. Men like Harry and Howard who refused to cooperate with the authorities in any way, and refused to do alternative work for the war effort, were called 'absolutists'.

More information at: http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/infodocs/cos/st_co_wwone3s2.html

Things to think about:

Younger children:

- What didn't you like about the story of Harry and Howard?
- What did you like – if anything – about the story?
- What do you think about Harry and Howard not going to war?

Older children:

- What do you think of the way conscientious objectors were treated by the authorities?
- How hard do you think it was to stand out against public opinion? Why do you think so many people were intolerant of the pacifists?
- How far do you agree with Harry and Howard that they should not only refuse to fight, but that they should refuse to do anything that contributed to the war effort, and released others to fight?
- Do you think refusing to fight in a war is an easy or hard decision? Why?

SENTENCED TO BE SHOT.



Howard C. Marten is a Quaker. John R. Ring, an East Barnet Socialist. Two of the conscientious objectors sentenced to death by a court-martial for refusing all military duties. The sentence was commuted by Sir Douglas Haig to ten years' penal servitude.

Corder Catchpool

Thomas Corder Catchpool was born in Leicester. He went to Sidcot and Bootham Quaker schools. Corder was a Quaker and a firm pacifist by the time he had left school. He was over thirty when WWI broke out. He was an excellent footballer and had been captain of the teams in both of his secondary schools but his ambition was to become a doctor in order to help people. However, the cost of training was beyond him and his family and so he became an engineer. At the start of the war, no one had to join the armed forces if they did not want to. Corder refused to fight but still felt that he had to do something positive. Corder decided that he would join the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) which was being formed by Quakers to provide opportunities for pacifists (alternativists) to help relieve at least some of the suffering being inflicted on all sides.

Corder felt it was part of his Christian duty to find a way of relieving suffering wherever he found it and whoever the person was (including the 'enemy'). If he had joined the Royal Army Medical Corps he would only have been able to treat the wounded of the British Army or its allies, and not men from the 'other side'. Corder served voluntarily in the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) from 1914 to 1916.

Because of his earlier interest in medicine, no doubt Corder enjoyed the training given at a special camp set in Buckinghamshire. It included stretcher drill, first aid and dressing practice. Then he and many others were ready to set sail for France or Belgium. Before they had got far they came across a torpedoed ship which was sinking. They rescued many sailors and brought them back to England and then set out again. This time they landed at Dunkirk, with no hold-ups and were immediately met by a tide of wounded soldiers coming back from the front and waiting near the Railway line. Corder wrote:

"I shall never in my life forget the sight and sounds that met us... The air heavy with the stench of putrid flesh, and thick with groans and cries. Four hundred wounded, and one French medical student to attend to them, two English officers helping voluntarily. Half dead as we were with fatigue, we flung ourselves into this work throughout the night, the need was so great ... We were only able to touch a fringe."

In 1916, when conscription was introduced Corder had a battle of conscience. He thought that being in a medical corps might be seen as an easy way out for those who opposed the war. So he resigned from the Ambulance Unit, came back to England and became a conscientious objector (CO). As with other COs he came before a tribunal. They accepted his sincere objections to fighting but could not understand why he would not join the Royal Army Medical Corps. But for Corder joining the RAMC would be like supporting the war effort. So he refused and was sent to prison. He told the court martial which sentenced him *"I have heard a call above the roar of the guns."*

Whilst in prison, Corder realised that it was not enough for him simply to refuse to take part in war; he had to do something positive for peace. So he began to learn German and when the war was over he travelled to Germany to take part in relief work where starvation was taking many lives, especially those of children. In this way, Corder hoped that he could help mend relations between countries and reduce the risk of such a war ever happening again.

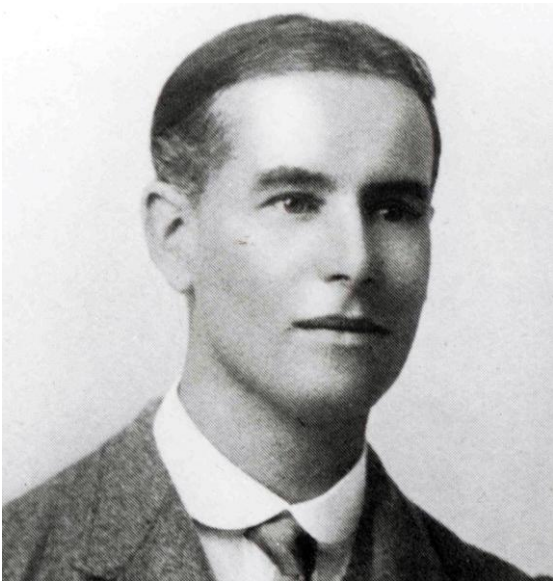
Things to think about:

Younger children:

- What didn't you like about the story of Corder?
- What did you like – if anything – about the story?

Older children:

- Do you agree with Corder's decision to join the Friends Ambulance Unit as opposed to a) fighting and b) joining the Royal Army Medical Corps?
- What do you think of Corder's refusal to stay in the Friends Ambulance Unit after conscription?
- Corder told the court martial which sentenced him "*I have heard a call above the roar of the guns.*" What do you think he meant by this?
- Some people would have thought that Corder's decision to go to Germany after the war was wrong. Why might they have thought that? What's your opinion?
- Corder's granddaughter has described Corder as 'a hero in our family' – do you think that Corder was a hero, was brave?



"I have heard a call above the roar of the guns."

Emily Hobhouse

This is most suitable for older children.

Emily was the daughter of a Cornish clergyman. She had already been in trouble. She had found out that in another country South Africa, in another war, the Anglo-Boer war, the English army had been putting women and children into horrible fenced places called prison camps. She helped to stop this and also got lots of money to help the women and children. Lots of people thought she was wrong to help in this way. So, when WWI broke out, Emily Hobhouse, though by now suffering from poor health, knew immediately how the victims of the war would be suffering. In a letter to the Manchester Guardian she wrote:

"Few English people have seen war in its nakedness. [...] They know nothing of the poverty, destruction, disease, pain, misery and mortality which follows in its train. [...] I have seen all of this and more."



Emily joined a Quaker relief organisation early in the war and then became involved in an international women's peace conference in 1915, though her movements were closely watched by those in government. In 1916, she managed to travel alone to Germany - she was the sole person from any of the warring countries who actually journeyed to the other side in search of peace. Because of her connections and reputation she was able to meet some high ranking German officials and visit a camp in Belgium where British civilians were being kept. She returned to England hoping that she could help create a peace settlement. This turned out to be wishful thinking, although she was able to help with the exchange of non-military people on both sides who had been imprisoned because they were caught in the wrong place at the outbreak of war.

With help from the newly set up Save the Children's Fund and Quaker relief funds as well as donations from many countries including South Africa, Emily was able to get food to thousands of starving people in Germany and Austria after the war. As well as working at a personal level, Emily was a great supporter of a new organisation called the League of Nations, which was set up straight after the First World War in the hope that it would prevent such a disaster ever happening again.

When Emily Hobhouse died in 1926, she was remembered in South Africa and in Germany for her humanitarian work, much more than in this country. She had been described as a traitor and as 'unpatriotic'. But she was very aware that war always affects huge numbers of innocent people and had tried to do what she could in places of the greatest suffering.

Things to think about:

- From the information you have been given what can you say about Emily Hobhouse's character?
- How do you think Emily could defend herself against the charge of being a traitor to her country for criticising the British 'concentration' camps?
- In your opinion was Emily right to focus her attention on the needs of people in Germany and Austria after the War? Why do you think she did this?



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Resource 3



Engage

Stories from WWI

COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE

ORGANIZED attempt is being made by Military Men and others to **COMPEL** every young man to become a soldier.

These people want us all, whether we will or no, to leave our labour, which is real service for the State, and spend a part of each year **in being trained to kill men!**

If one man kills another intentionally it is murder. Is it not murder if the killing is wholesale? Vast numbers of good citizens believe it to be **wicked to take the life of fellow men** even in war.

The people of other nations are **our fellow workmen and good friends**. They buy our manufactures and employ us; we buy from them the things we want. They have no more thought of invading us than we have of invading them. Why then should we be compelled to do what our conscience tells us is wrong?

Our forefathers won for us civil and religious liberty—**freedom of conscience to obey God rather than man**. This liberty was won at great cost: will you let it be destroyed?

*Issued by the PEACE COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,
136, Bishopsgate, London, E.C.
1913.*

BRITONS



JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY!
GOD SAVE THE KING

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Friends War Victims Relief Workers set off 1914



Dyce Prison Camp 1916





Journeys in the Spirit

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Resource 4

Engage

What is my conscience?



Say that you are going to talk a little bit about a big word – a word that is very important for Quakers. The word is '*conscience*'. It is also a word that was very important for the men and women who said no to fighting or war.

Ask everybody to sit still and comfortable.

Now ask everybody to think about, imagine, that they are in a garden or a playground. A lady bird is walking across a path in the garden or playground. Now say that another child is laughing and saying she or he is going to squash the ladybird.

Tell everybody to imagine that they have a very strong feeling or idea that they must stop the person and rescue the ladybird. Ask everybody to imagine that they are rushing to the insect, bending down and letting it climb onto their hand and then carrying it to a bush and safety.

After a little pause give each child a copy of the person shape (see over or below) and a pencil or crayon. Ask everybody to think about when they knew they had to rescue the ladybird. Now ask 'where in your body did you have the feeling, or hear the voice in you, to rescue the ladybird – maybe your tummy, your head or where your heart is – or maybe somewhere else?

After a few moments ask them to make a mark, (or draw a shape that they think of or write the word '*conscience*') on their person shape where they had the feeling or where the voice was.



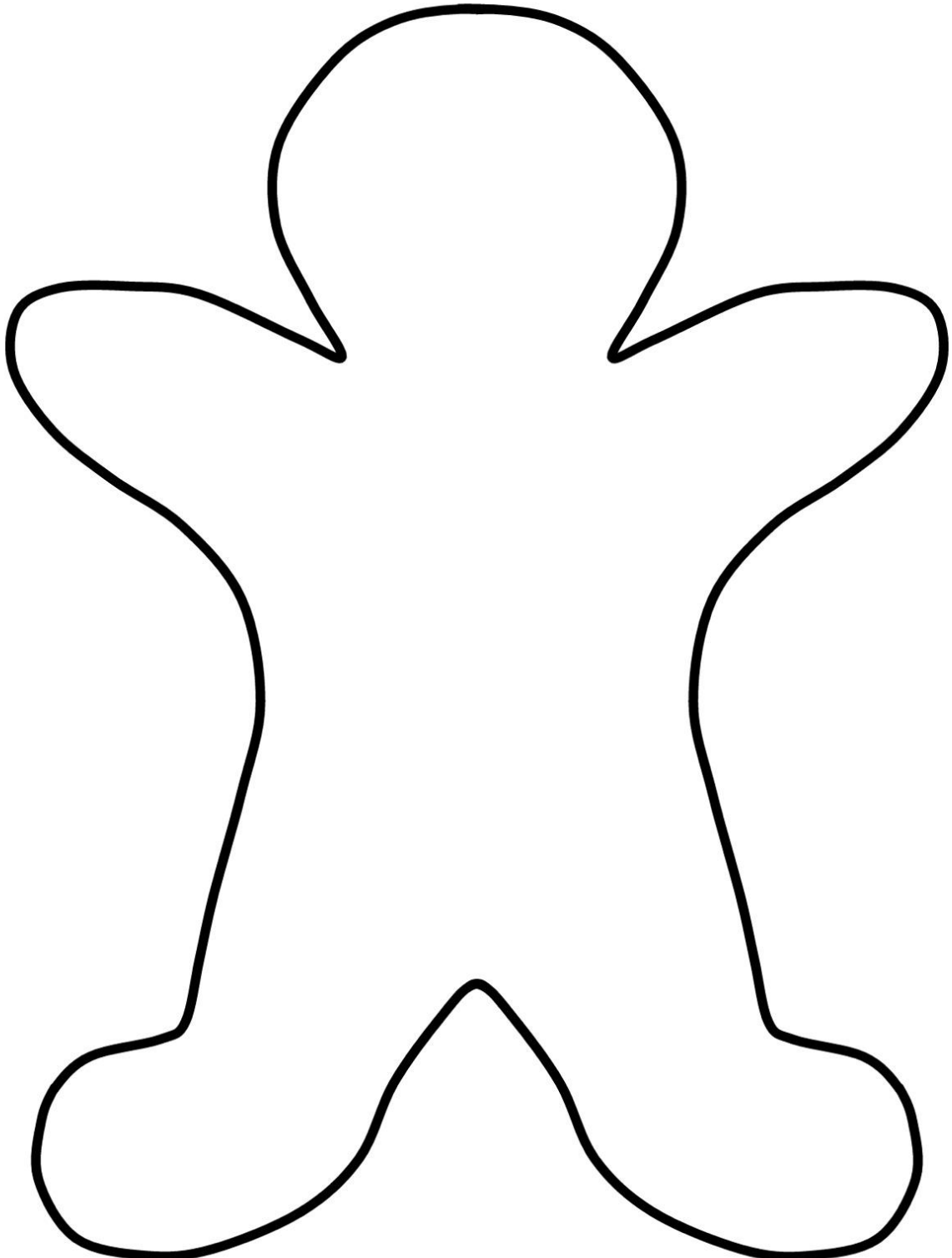


Journeys in the Spirit

Resource Sheet 4 White feather stories



Engage What is my conscience? Body shape





Journeys in the Spirit

White feather stories

Resource 5



Engage

Reclaim the white feather

Fierce Feathers: A true story of the Society of Friends in America

In 1775, Robert Nisbet, a Quaker preacher, set out on Friday to arrive at a new and remote settlement by Sunday, to preach. It was a thirty-mile walk, tiring and thirsty, and he slept two nights in the open. The journey could be dangerous too. Many of the white settlers, though not the Friends, had used guns against the native Americans, and the response was swift, and often murderous.

As Robert walked, he thought about how to preach. The small community of Friends he was visiting were fearful and hard pressed, but faithful to their peaceful intentions. Every day there were stories of fierce fighting between settlers and Native Americans. Robert chose a Bible verse, Psalm 91, verse 4. '**God will cover you with his feathers. Under his wings you will find refuge. Do not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day.**' Robert Nisbet planned a short sermon on the text.

On Sunday morning, as usual, all the Friends, from the eldest grandparent to the tiniest child, sat together in silent worship and meditation in the largest of their wooden cabins. It was a fresh morning, with a clear sky. The doors and windows were left open, and a gentle wind blew through. Robert read his text, and the people listened while he spent a few minutes sharing his thoughts. Silence descended: the community was worshipping. No sound arose inside the cabin. But outside soft footfalls came into the little village.

The native American chief followed by many men crept into the little group of wooden buildings. They carried war axes, scalping knives, arrows and bows. They came to kill the settlers, and drive the whites away from their land. At first they thought the tiny village was deserted, but their expert trackers noticed all footprints leading to the largest cabin. They silently surrounded the wooden building.

Then two of the men stepped across the open window. Two more, and the chief, stood in the doorway. One by one, the worshipping Friends inside noticed the presence of the attackers. The quiet air crackled with tension. Each one looked to Robert: he motioned with his hands to keep still, to continue in prayer. Time stretched. The native American eyes took in the scene. There were no guns. No swords. No weapons. Then the Chief murmured to his men in a low voice. Silently, one by one, each man laid his axe and weapons on the ground. Each one filed into the crowded cabin. They too sat at peace with the Friends in worship.

Minutes passed, and the oldest of the Friends, a man called Zebulon, closed the meeting with a blessing. He stood, approached the Chief, and wordlessly motioned him to follow. He took the chief home, and shared his meal with him. Another of the men told Robert, 'We came to kill you, and destroy your settlement. But you worship the Great Spirit in silence as we do.' The men gave the Friends a white feather and an arrow as signs of peace, to display from their rooftop. There was no war between them.

Adapted from:

http://www.tudo.co.uk/quakers_craw/shell_quakers/contents/quakers/fierce_feathers.html

Footnote: In a Native American language the name White-feather means the bravest of the brave.

The Parihaka story.



This photo is from the film at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI0Djql_e84 This film shows a journey of Maori children into the Parihaka story. It is a moving film with Maori singing that emphasises both the strength and sadness that comes from the story.

The film at this link <http://parihaka.com/> gives a brief history and is for adults and older children – watch before showing!

Here is a brief written history:

By 1872 the warfare that had flared in New Zealand since 1860 had come to an end. The war had been devastating to Maori life, and further war was not a viable option. Then, to add to Maori degradation, there was the government's confiscation of vast tracts of Maori land, which was eagerly sought after by the land-hungry European settlers. Part of the land designated for confiscation was on the western flanks of Mount Taranaki and included the village of Parihaka.

Here Te Whiti had come and, with his fellow leader Tohu Kakahi, set up a unique community. Instead of the usual fortified village, Te Whiti created an open village on the banks of the Waitotoroa. It was in a real sense a model village, for its layout was carefully planned, the economy and agriculture were efficiently managed, the education of the young was seen to, sanitation and health measures were enforced, and alcohol was forbidden.

Until 1877, the government ignored the fact that Maori had returned to live on land that had been officially confiscated. Settler pressure mounted, however, for the acquisition of these fertile lands, and the surveying of the Waimate Plains to the south of Mount Taranaki began. In 1879 the surveyors smashed Maori fences and destroyed crops. Te Whiti and his people realised that if they took no action the land would simply be taken, and the question of justice would go by default. So, in March 1879, Te Whiti's men packed up the surveyors' equipment for them and escorted them across the Waingongoro River to land legitimately sold earlier.

Te Whiti was an outstanding orator, and by the strength of his mana (authority, spiritual strength, charisma) he forged his people into a cohesive and unified community. Many from other tribes joined them. From his study of the Scriptures, Te Whiti was able to offer an explanation for the suffering of the people: it was God's work, and through their suffering they would attain grace. He reminded them that they were not the only ones to suffer, but in God alone lay salvation. God would in the end vindicate the small people of the world. It was only a

small step from that theology to passive Maori resistance to pakeha force. Te Whiti told his followers:

Go. Put your hands to the plough. Look not back. If any come with guns and swords be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged. Another will take up the good work.

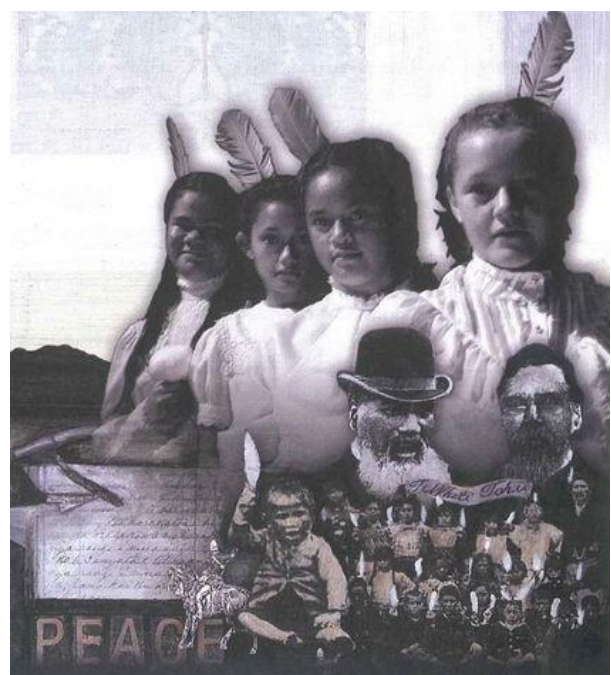
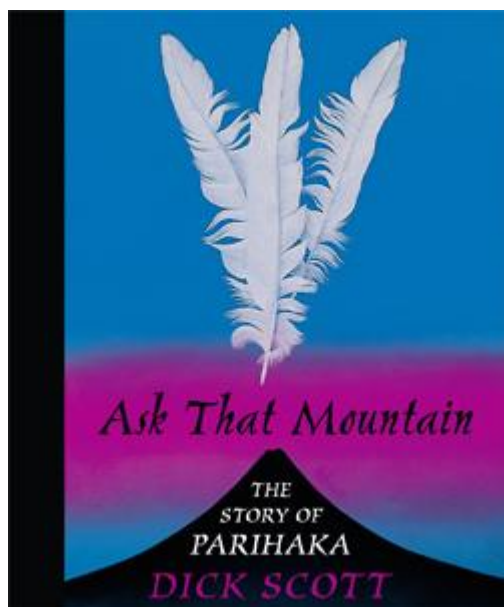
Te Whiti was by no means anti-pakeha (European). Much later in his life, when asked if it were true that he had predicted that one day all pakeha would be swept into the sea, he dismissed it angrily:

What I said and wished to convey was, that the two races should live side by side in peace, . . . the white man to live among us - not we to be subservient to his immoderate greed.

The inevitable confrontation developed, with the protesters being arrested. Their places were taken by more of Te Whiti's supporters, till all the gaols were full. The settlers were adamant in their insatiable demand for land, and Te Whiti and his people were defiant. The Native Minister, John Bryce, was determined not to give in to what he considered a handful of Maori troublemakers. The government had no intention of backing down, and in October 1881 eager volunteers formed a group of armed constabulary and were ordered to Parihaka to arrest Te Whiti and other leaders in the Parihaka community.

When the troops reached Parihaka at 7.15 a.m. on 5 November, they found the fences pulled down to allow them in, and they were offered bread. The only thing in their way was a group of 200 children singing songs. The children wore white feathers to symbolise peace. When Bryce read the Riot Act and called on the Maori to disperse, he was met with silence. When the arresting party entered, the Maori cleared a way for them. Te Whiti and his assistant Tohu Kakahi and their wives walked with dignity into captivity. The troops dispersed any Maori who were not local and destroyed most of the crops and part of the village. Te Whiti and Tohu were charged with using seditious language, but never tried, despite frequent demands for a fair trial. They remained under arrest without trial for a year in the South Island, but in the end had to be released.

The surveying of the confiscated land had not been prevented, though a Royal Commission in 1926 found that the Maori land claims were just. Te Whiti and Tohu returned to Parihaka in 1883. They had to rebuild the community, which had fallen into disrepair. The campaign of civil disobedience as a protest against the unjust confiscations continued, with the ploughing of disputed lands. Te Whiti was imprisoned again for six months in 1886, and in 1897 ninety-two Maori were arrested for similar actions.





Journeys in the Spirit

White feather stories

Resource 6



Respond

Reclaim the white feather

