

PEACE EDUCATION NETWORK

Teach Peace Pack

Assembly: The importance of disobedience



Aim: to explore doing what you believe to be right.

Planning/Preparation: with a large group you may want to use 'stand up' to represent 'fight' and 'sit down' to represent 'won't fight'. Alternatively, you could get a small group of children to do the activity at the front on behalf of everyone.

With a small enough group this assembly can be done with one side of the room marked 'Fight' and the other 'Won't fight' and the children go to whichever side of the room represents their decision.

1 Introduction

Explain that you are going to tell the children a story.

The story is about making a very difficult decision. The person in this story has to decide whether to go to war and fight for his country or refuse to fight.

I want you to imagine that you are that person and try to make the decision for them.

Say you're going to ask them some questions. If your answer is that you would fight, you want the students to 'stand up' (or do something visual, such as put their hands up). If you would refuse to fight then stay sitting down

2 Telling the story

Explain that you are going to tell the story slowly, only giving a little bit of information at a time. So if you change your mind during the activity then

change your position. [After each point in this story give the children a moment to change their mind if they wish. You also might want to occasionally get feedback on their reasons, if time allows.]

- *Your country has just become involved in a huge war – a world war – and you have been called up to fight in the army. Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *The government have made a law that you have to fight so those of you sitting down and not fighting will be breaking the law and will be punished... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *You are a married man with three young children... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *Your family rely on you to provide for them so if you join the army and fight you will be paid and be able to look after them – and even if you get seriously injured there will be a pension – but not fighting would leave your family's future less certain... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *You live in Austria, and it is 1943. So this is World War II. And Austria fought on the side of Germany – so you would be joining Hitler's army... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *Under Hitler the punishment for refusing to fight is that you will be killed (you will be beheaded)... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *You are a Christian and think it is impossible to be a good Christian and fight for Hitler... Do you fight or not fight...?*
- *You go to your priest for advice and he tells you that it is your duty to fight for your country... Do you fight or not fight...?*

- You go to consult the local bishop and he agrees with the priest, it is your duty to fight for your country... Do you fight or not fight...?
- You go to talk with your mother. She tells you that you must fight as it is the only way you can look after your wife and children (her grandchildren)... Do you fight or not fight...?
- Final decision time... you have talk it through one last time with your wife. She tells you that she supports you. She knows it is an impossible situation but you have to do what you think is right and not to worry about her. Do you fight or do you refuse to fight...?

[Announce whether most people are fighting or not]

3 Franz Jägerstätter

Explain: *This actually happened to an Austrian man called Franz Jägerstätter. Franz decided that he could not fight for an evil cause and was killed for refusing to fight.*

A sad end to a difficult story.

But it is not quite the end because today, all these years later, Franz is considered a hero by peacemakers...

4 Being a peacemaker

Ask the children: *Why do you think Franz is considered a hero by peacemakers? What can we learn from Franz about working for peace?* [Look for answers about doing the right thing even when it is difficult].

5 Conclusion

We are not faced with huge decisions like Franz, but we can learn something from him. Often we can feel pressured or tempted to do the wrong thing. People might want us to join in being nasty or unkind to someone in our class or one of our friends at home. When this happens we must be brave enough to say no. We must refuse to join in. We must stand up for what is right.

Follow up activities/resources:

- For more about Franz Jägerstätter see Pax Christi's education resources on Peace People at www.paxchristi.org.uk.
- Discuss with your class if they can think of a time when they have refused to do something they know to be wrong.
- See www.veteransforpeace.org.uk to explore recent stories of men and women who have decided it is against their conscience to fight.
- To see members of Veterans for Peace discarding their medals go to https://youtu.be/_rZgtMGD_o8 for a short film.
- Book a school speaker from Veterans for Peace: www.veteransforpeace.org.uk/education
- For help with introducing sensitive issues see:

Headlines: War and Conflict: Tackling Controversial Issues in the Classroom by primary head teacher Marguerite Heath, 2010.

Teaching Controversial Issues, Oxfam GB, available online at www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teacher-support/tools-and-guides/controversial-issues.