



Citizenship Lesson (Primary/ Secondary)

Stolen Childhoods

This lesson is based on the Denise Affonço case study but an extension project also refers to Ben Helfgott's story. It has been written in partnership with EveryChild, a UK charity which works with vulnerable children in Cambodia and around the world.

Starter

Encourage students to think about their everyday lives, their day to day routine. **Talk** about the things they enjoy doing and things to which they look forward. **Ask** everyone to draw a circle or pie chart showing all the things they do and the percentage of time spent on each activity in one week. Activities could include school, time with family, playing with friends, sports, youth clubs, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, drama, dance, watching favourite football team, watching TV, using the internet etc

Decide how many of these activities are linked with being a young person or a child. Do children have a right to be allowed to do these things? Do we take many of them for granted here in the UK?

Stage one

Explain that on Holocaust Memorial Day we are thinking about children whose rights to a happy childhood were stolen. **Challenge** students to find Cambodia on a map or a globe. **Tell** them you are going to think about children who lived in Cambodia in the 1970s when a genocide was taking place. **Explain** that genocide means that there is a deliberate policy to destroy particular groups of people, like the Jews in the Holocaust, the Tutsis in Rwanda and Muslims in Bosnia. In Cambodia, in the 1970s, under the rule of a man called Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge soldiers it is estimated that at least two million people died. **Relate** the story of Denise Affonço and her children in Cambodia. Try to tell the story in your own words and think about the age and aptitude of your students. **Suggest** they think about all the children in the story and what happened to them. **Discuss** in particular the fate of Denise's daughter Jeanie, aged 9 and her nephew Ha, aged 8. Both of them died. Why did they die?

Stage two

Encourage students to think about Denise's surviving son, Jean Jacques. While the Khmer Rouge were in control he was separated from his Mum and sent to a special camp where children were no longer allowed to act as children. **Give** everyone a list (an example is on the next page) of some of the things children were forbidden to do.

read books	play games
sing songs	wear glasses
go to school	have any money
talk about their old life in the city	listen to the radio
laugh	cry
say that they loved their family	

In other words, childhood was stolen from the children.

Ask students to work with a partner. They should look at the list and decide which of these things would be the hardest for a child to give up. Then think about Jean Jacques when he left Cambodia for a new life in France, what things might he find difficult to do when he was free to rebuild his life and restart his education?

Stage Three

Talk about Cambodia after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge. **Explain** that it always takes a very long time for a country to recover from something as terrible as genocide.

Can the students think of any reasons for that? **Suggest** that it takes many years to learn to trust people again and to live without fear. People died from hunger and sickness and many were executed. It took a very long time for those who survived to recover from the shock of all they witnessed. The Khmer Rouge banned money, moved people out of the cities and split up families. It was very difficult for life to return to normal. How could you understand what money is and how it works if you had spent years without it?

But a real problem was linked with the experiences faced by children. Today medical, social and scientific research shows that if people see terrible things when they are children they do not forget them when they grow up. Today Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world and the country's present day children suffer desperate hardship because lots of adults are scarred by their own childhood experiences. Also as so many people died during the genocide there are not so many older people left to look after today's children and set them an example. Today 45% of the population are children under the age of 18. When the Khmer Rouge were in charge children were treated as though they were grown up. That is why Ha was executed for stealing food even though he was only eight years old.

Even today children are not treated differently because they are young. If a child gets into trouble and breaks the law, even in a small way, then he or she might be put on trial without a lawyer and punished by being sent to an adult prison.

As a whole class **discuss** some of the things we expect adults to teach children. **Write** a list on the white board. How do we learn from our parents and other adults? We expect grown ups to set a good example for children. But how can grown ups do this when they had no parents to set a good example for them? When they were children the only grown ups they met treated children and their families unkindly. Today it is hard to find work in Cambodia and it is common for adults to leave their children behind when they move from place to place looking for a job. Some children are cared for by other relatives but many end up on the street.

So today in modern Cambodia children are still suffering from the affects of genocide even though it happened over thirty years ago.

Arrange students in groups and **ask** them to suggest answers to this question. How can we turn a Legacy of Hatred into a **Legacy of Hope**? How can we give childhood back to children? Ask them to turn their suggestions into action points-things which people would find easy to do.

Stage Four

Share students' suggestions. Remember to value all of them but **ask** the class to decide on the three best action points. Now **tell** them about some of the things which are already happening and see how many match their own solutions.

EveryChild works with young people and their families in modern day Cambodia and tries to do four things to make life better for children and to help adults who lived through the genocide.

- 1) They teach adults how to be parents, giving them "parenting skills". This helps adults to remember to treat children as children and not use violence against them.
- 2) They try to protect children who live on the streets by running drop in centres where children can take part in activities designed especially for them as children. Children can also attend lessons in literature and maths and participate in sports activities. Children also go to the centres to be safe and to avoid getting into trouble with the police.
- 3) They campaign for fairness in justice and work to protect children's rights. When children get into trouble they should be treated like children.
- 4) They try to reunite separated families.

Challenge students to say, in a few words, in what ways these actions could be part of a **Legacy of Hope**? Individuals sometimes help EveryChild by sending a donation to help their work or by sponsoring an individual Cambodian child and helping to support their education or activities in their local community. **Suggest** that it might be difficult for young people to do this but if everyone made a decision on HMD to become a campaigner for children's rights simply by drawing awareness to what is fair and unfair perhaps less children would have their childhood stolen.

Conclusion

Remind the students of their initial happy thoughts about their own daily lives. **Ask** them which of their activities best represents their rights as a child.

Spend a quiet moment reflecting on the children whose lives were stolen because of the cruel actions of others in Cambodia (and the Holocaust, Bosnia, Rwanda and present day Darfur.)

Extension work or an additional project

Focus on the story of Ben Helfgott as another example of stolen childhood. **Note** how he had to work hard in a glass factory when he was only 12 and how he became involved in the smuggling of food into the ghetto. You could also **ask** students to research the UNCRC rights of the child.