

Introduction

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When we think of the word *peace*, we often think of it in concert with its opposite, *war*. So much of history, both ancient and modern, has been shaped by the wars that have taken place between peoples fighting for territory, freedom, and power. Not much has changed even today, as our most recent war in Iraq was fought, according to military and government leaders, to liberate the Iraqi people from the tyranny of a dictator. Some suspect that power and territory also may have been issues, but freedom from oppression has been touted as the driving force behind the invasion of Iraq by primarily British and U.S. forces.

Peace has long been sought by many civilizations and cultures, from the references to peace in the Old Testament; to the “Peace on Earth” anthem sung by the angels at the birth of Jesus; to the ancient Hindu prayer for peace, “Om, shantih, shantih, shantih”; to international attempts to institutionalize peace through the United Nations and the League of Nations. Peace in the Middle East has been the goal of the United Nations since the founding of Israel in 1948. Yet, in spite of the best efforts of some of the most effective diplomats, peace in that part of the world has been elusive. Looking at our most recent conflicts, the peace the United States sought in Vietnam was never fully realized in spite of the thousands of soldiers who died for the cause, and the peace between North and South Korea has been jittery at best, recently erupting in a nuclear threat from the North Korean government. We must go back to the aftermath of World War II to see peace in action, with the development of the Marshall Plan to aid in the reconstruction of Europe and reestablish relations between European countries formerly at war.

It seems paradoxical to *fight for peace*, yet that is the image most of us have of the struggle. There must be a conflict before there can be a peaceful resolution. Whether the fight is physical, emotional, or intellectual, two forces must be at odds in order for the “good guy” to win. This is certainly the perception most of our students have as they view world events and the conflicts in their own lives. The horrific tragedy of September 11, 2001, is a good example. The death and destruction wrought by nineteen Middle Eastern terrorists who managed to infiltrate the United States and use its airplanes as weapons against its people resulted in the kind of hatred by some that may be beyond reason

or understanding—hatred for anything and anyone Middle Eastern. Lacking a historical perspective, many of our young people have bought into this hatred as a result of the fear and helplessness they feel about the future.

Add to this the increase in teenage violence around the country, and it's apparent that military wars aren't the only kind of war on the minds of adolescents today. Gang wars on the streets and peer violence in the schools make being a teenager much more frightening than it was twenty-five or thirty years ago. No longer can school be thought of as a safe haven for students and teachers. Studying in the library or eating lunch in the cafeteria can be risky, as these are places where large numbers of students and teachers gather—proverbial sitting ducks for someone with violent intentions who has managed to smuggle a weapon into a building. The streets are even less safe. Drive-by shootings, abductions, and sex- and-drug-related crimes create an atmosphere of terror and frustration.

In our concern for our students, we sometimes forget that teachers too are profoundly affected by these events. In addition to fear for their personal safety, they wonder about their professional responsibility. How do they confront the issues of war, terrorism, and school and neighborhood violence with their students? How can they comfort and reassure these young people when they are so fearful and uncertain themselves? Just what is a teacher's responsibility in this time of terror? How do teachers respond when they are sometimes the victims of school violence?

This collection of articles from the *English Journal* aims to help teachers answer some of these questions. Most of the essays are taken from the May 2000 issue, also titled "A Curriculum of Peace," since that is the most comprehensive and diverse collection of articles that *EJ* has ever published on the subject. But several pieces are taken from earlier and later years, as well. Though some of the resources cited in the earlier articles may seem dated, the ideas they generate help to expand and enrich the development of a curriculum of peace in the secondary school. As these essays address the myriad ways in which educators can teach for peace, they also offer teachers the comfort of knowing they are not alone in this endeavor.

In her book *The Peaceable Classroom*, Mary Rose O'Reilley asks, "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" (9). The question was presented to her and other teaching assistants by a distinguished professor years earlier, and though they thought he was kidding at the time, for O'Reilley the question would not go away. With apologies to O'Reilley and her professor, I borrow the question as

a unifying device for this collection, for it has haunted me ever since I read her book. Can we, indeed, teach English so that people stop killing each other? And, if so, how do we put into action such a huge leap of faith in the secondary classroom?

Our professional forebears such as James Moffett, Louise Rosenblatt, Donald Murray, and others have taught us that, in order to learn, students must be engaged in their work, must care about what they are doing, and must see some connection between what they are learning and what they already know. Applying these three criteria to a curriculum that promotes understanding of others in relation to ourselves in diverse realms of life seems a wise and potentially successful way to teach for peace. In these days of state standards and mandated testing, it is more important than ever to remember our shared humanity as we plan our curriculum. In examining the ideas and activities contained in the chapters of this book, teachers may discover that many of the standards to which they must teach are being addressed. As for testing, the ability to think critically is one of the most essential skills students must possess in order to pass any test. Teaching for peace in the ways suggested here encourages the kind of thought and insight that will serve students well. Developing a curriculum of peace need not be at odds with a teacher's concerns about standards and testing because the wise teacher will find ways to incorporate relevant content into the pursuit of these goals. While no academic curriculum is a panacea for the world's ills, and there is no guarantee that any amount of education will result in the desired outcome, teachers must begin somewhere, and the articles in this collection are a good place to start for those who believe that we truly can "teach English so that people stop killing each other."

Part I: Peace and War

This section sets out to establish the idea of physical conflict and how it affects combatants on both sides, their countries, and innocent civilians. Beginning with a piece by Larry R. Johannessen that focuses on teaching literature, this section concentrates heavily on the human aspect of war. By its very nature, young adult literature reaches adolescents in a way not always possible with more difficult, often distancing, texts, providing more opportunities for students to, as Rosenblatt says, "seek through literature an enlargement of our experiences" (40). Understanding this, Johannessen discusses four types of young adult literature that have emerged since the Vietnam War, pointing out three major devices the authors use to convey meaning. Looking closely at

The Combat Narrative, The War At Home, The Refugee Experience, and The Next Generation, he offers detailed explanations of titles that fit these categories and suggestions for “unlocking meaning” through teaching these novels, debunking the distorted “Rambo myth” that is sometimes the extent of student knowledge of this war. Indeed, Johannessen’s insights are invaluable when discussing any war, as we are often caught up in military statistics and television sound bites, making it easy to forget the human cost of combat. Some students may have parents or grandparents who fought in the Vietnam War, and many certainly have friends or relatives who served in either the Gulf War or the most recent war in Iraq. Reading this literature, seeing the horrors of combat, and reflecting on the human element of war can be the starting point for discussing peaceful resolution of conflict.

Further emphasizing the human toll of war, Carolyn Lott and Stephanie Wasta illustrate their use of children’s and young adult literature to help students see the difficulties experienced by people involved in fighting a war on their own country’s soil. By reading actual Civil War letters as well as historical fiction, and by keeping journals in the voices of teens experiencing the war, students can gain a valuable perspective on why civil wars are fought and how they might be prevented. Lott and Wasta’s efforts are a good example of how teachers can use reader response and firsthand engagement to advance understanding of a distant and abstract concept such as war. By beginning with their own emotional and physical conflicts with peers and possibly examining the territorialism of gang violence, students can be led to understand the concept of civil war and see that it is not always military in nature. What kinds of forces cause otherwise peaceful, friendly people to turn on one another and fight to the death? How can these forces be dealt with before it’s too late?

To most adolescents today, World War II seems like ancient history, but Joan Ruddiman makes it immediate in her unit on this war in a multicultural suburban school. Giving her students the opportunity to view the war from the perspective of their countries of origin, she has them interview parents and grandparents while doing extensive reading and research. She encourages her students to think critically about the consequences of war and how events of long ago still affect our world today. Historical accounts are nicely balanced with human recollections, making for a richer and more interesting learning experience. Perhaps more than any other war, World War II was a turning point in our history. Why? This is an intriguing question for students to investigate. Most everyone has heard of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, and to the free world they are truly the “bad guys.” But Hitler

and his soldiers were not always torturers and murderers. They too were once children. What forces made them what they became? What can we do to prevent such forces from reemerging?

Offering a slightly different perspective, Randal W. Withers argues for the inclusion of the contemporary antiwar novel in the high school literature canon, pointing out that such works as *The Red Badge of Courage* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* have long been staples of the curriculum. Reasoning that more recent antiwar literature such as Tim O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato* and Don Delillo's *End Zone* will help students "better understand the impact of war on a variety of social issues" and "educate them so that the tragedy of war is not repeated," Withers offers several titles and describes how they might be used in the classroom. As he points out, Arthur Applebee's 1993 research on the teaching of literature in the secondary school reveals that the classics still prevail and little contemporary literature, especially antiwar literature, is being taught. If we are ever to create a curriculum of peace, we must certainly offer students the most compelling, and the most relevant, literature to read as part of that curriculum. We must become informed ourselves about the possibilities by reading widely in our professional literature and in the literature we might use in our classrooms.

Moving away from the idea that war and peace can be studied successfully only in English and social studies classrooms, Rita Bornstein believes that peace studies must be interdisciplinary to be effective. She describes a unit taught by teachers in the language arts, social studies, art, music, and science departments that resulted in high enrollment and great success in helping students "focus forward" rather than backward as they study war and peace. She lists seven major goals for this unit, which include examining personal values and beliefs about war and peace, looking at the nature of human aggression, analyzing conflict and various models for peacekeeping, and examining the relationship of the individual to the state. Countless books and articles in our professional literature have shown us that an interdisciplinary approach to learning provides rich opportunities for our students, but they haven't said much about the value of this kind of learning to teachers. Through working with colleagues in other disciplines, we gain knowledge that we might otherwise not have access to. As our students see us learning, they realize that the acquisition of knowledge is a lifelong process, a lesson we can teach them by "showing" rather than "telling."

An article on the Middle East is the final piece in this section. Though it focuses more on group investigation of the 1991 Middle East

conflict than on the conflict itself, it is still valuable in its interdisciplinary method and satisfying results. Challenging their students to answer the question “How can we achieve peace in the Middle East?,” Jack Huhtala and Elaine B. Coughlin launched an interdisciplinary project in their tenth-grade English and government classes. Using a method of instruction called “group investigation,” developed by Shlomo Sharan of Tel Aviv, Huhtala and Coughlin used a six-stage process to help their students learn more about the Middle East and its people. While at first their students reacted unthinkingly when confronted with the dilemma of how to handle hostile nations, with remarks like “Just nuke them,” they gradually began to see that the conflict was not that easily resolved. Through listening to speakers, conducting interviews, and reading various books and articles, the students learned to work together democratically to arrive at an answer to the focus question. While many books and articles have touted the benefits of cooperative learning, this promising account of interdisciplinary success demonstrates that collaboration among teachers and students, though not without its problems, can be a valuable part of the peaceable curriculum.

As all of the pieces in this section demonstrate, examining the concept of war can enrich our students’ understanding of human conflict and how it might be resolved. Teachers might broach the subject of motivation and consequences by asking questions such as the following: Is there such a thing as a “good war”? Are antiwar proponents unpatriotic? Is peaceful negotiation the answer to all problems? What has been the public reaction to war during the past century and into the twenty-first? In fiction, many young men go to war because they see it as glamorous. Does this hold true in life as well? The possibilities for discussion, and insight, are many.

Part II: Peace and the Arts

The arts have always been a medium for expressing our response to war and conflict, from Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, to Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum est,” to the seventies song “War, What Is It Good For?” This section of the book offers three essays that demonstrate how poetry, music, dance, drama, and personal story can work to reduce the covert violence of name-calling, rudeness, racism, sexism, and psychological intimidation among students.

Nancy Gorrell’s “Teaching Empathy through Ecphrastic Poetry” demonstrates how poetic response to great works of art that depict violent acts can teach students the value of empathy and result in better

understanding of others different from themselves. Objectification of an “other” is often used as a justification for violence, and responding to images of violent acts through poetry writing provides a means of examining our own biases and prejudices. As Gorrell points out, it’s important that we *teach*, not *preach*, empathy by giving students the opportunity to “‘enter into’ the feeling and spirit of others.” To do this, she uses an ephrastic poem of address titled “To the Little Polish Boy Standing with His Arms Up” by Peter L. Fischl, written in response to a photograph of a little Polish boy that was published in *LIFE* magazine in November 1960. After much discussion about the similarities between Fischl’s life and that of the little boy in the photo, Gorrell invites her students to write their own poetic response to the photo. The results, as she demonstrates in the article, are thought provoking.

Though Gorrell’s unit focuses on teaching about the Holocaust, her method of using ephrastic poetry as a vehicle for understanding others can be expanded and refocused in many different ways. Students can write ephrastic poetry in response to any work of art. Taking them to a museum and allowing them to respond to any piece that moves them can be a starting point to showing them works that focus more on human difference or unjust or inhumane treatment of others.

In addition to using poetry as a means of understanding others, Mary F. Wright and Sandra Kowalczyk delve further into the arts by employing music, dance, drama, and printmaking to help their students “hear, read, think, and feel the message of peace in the world.” We know that we learn best when we can use all of our senses in the process, and this project taps that potential. Not only do students learn about the Holocaust, but they also examine, among other things, the events of Hiroshima, the horror of slavery, and the importance of cultural identity, using their minds, hands, and bodies in the learning process. Young people do not soon forget what they experience, and using the creative and performing arts as a means of understanding can indeed help build bridges between and among cultures.

The last piece in this section serves as a segue to the next, perhaps summing up the reasons why peace education is so important in our schools. As G. Lynn Nelson points out in “Warriors with Words,” metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and armed guards may be common in U.S. schools today, but such methods can never reduce the covert violence of name-calling, rudeness, racism, sexism, and psychological intimidation. Using examples from his students, Nelson demonstrates how the power of personal story can go a long way toward promoting peace and well-being in the classroom and beyond. “Why personal story?” he asks. “Because without that nothing else

matters." Paraphrasing Rollo May, Nelson reminds us that violence "is itself a form of communication," something that we teachers tend to forget. In our zeal to instruct students in the skills of expository and argumentative writing so that they can pass state proficiency tests, we forget where our students' souls reside. Nelson beautifully reminds us what it means to write meaningful prose. Using as an example a student in his Native American first-year composition class, he lets us hear Kyle tell his story in a poem titled "Broken Arrows, Broken Hearts: I Will Fight No More." Nelson won the NCTE Hopkins Award for this piece, an essay that so touchingly demonstrates the power of story to heal and comfort. It may prompt us to wonder: If Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had been encouraged to tell their stories, would the horror of Columbine have happened? And it might certainly encourage us to make room for the personal story in our writing curriculum.

Part III: Peace and Our Schools

Achieving peace in our schools seems like the first step toward a peaceful world, for our students have the opportunity every day to interact with others different from themselves in race, gender, culture, and class. Though we wish for a positive result from this interaction, the seeds of conflicts that occur worldwide on a larger scale are frequently sown in the school years: territorialism, mistrust, envy, alienation, hatred born of misunderstanding. With such a golden opportunity to teach for peace, why have we teachers failed so miserably? Or is achieving peace through classroom experience and instruction an impossible goal?

Sara Dalmas Jonsberg tells us that we must begin by making "a place for every student." She believes that loneliness and fear are at the root of the alienation students often feel, which sometimes has self-destructive and far-reaching consequences. The visible curriculum, she says, doesn't matter very much. It's the hidden curriculum we must pay attention to. The competition for grades, the conformity required for social acceptance—these are matters that work against a peaceful classroom, and they are matters that teachers must deal with. Building a sense of community in the classroom is essential, as Randy Bomer and others have pointed out. In discussing school violence, Jonsberg's question, "Why does our gaze always linger on the victims, refusing compassion or empathy for the perpetrators?," may offend some, but it is an honest question that deserves scrutiny. How can we ever achieve peace if we don't try to understand those who would destroy it?

Marsha Lee Holmes gets right down to business in her piece “Get Real: Violence in Popular Culture *and* in English Class.” Holmes stresses that educators cannot and should not try to keep the “real world” out of their classrooms, as some administrators have tried to do as a result of school violence. Using examples from popular culture such as magazines, newspapers, music, and film, Holmes teaches critical inquiry by encouraging students to report on current violent events or review certain violent films. Giving convincing reasons for her direct approach, she cites Paulo Freire’s concept of a “problem-posing education” as part of her rationale, emphasizing that this kind of student inquiry is active, not passive.

Popular culture is an area often neglected in the English class, where literature is usually queen and grammar instruction eats up much of the curriculum. Yet here is a research base for students that can be far more instructive than answering study questions or analyzing sentences. As part of a peaceable curriculum, popular culture can be research heaven, as Holmes so expertly points out. What is happening in the world now is of primary interest to our students. Examining behavior, motivation, and consequences in real-life situations makes for the kind of learning that John Dewey called for many years ago, learning that taps the world students live in and brings it into the classroom.

Barbara R. Cangelosi is another educator who believes in real-world learning. As a teacher at an alternative high school for at-risk students, she often observed students taunting one another. Seeing that these students often communicate inappropriately, she devised an assertive communication unit to demonstrate to them that they can take control and get what they need without aggressive communication. Using activities that reveal that meaning is shaped by interpretation and past experience, Cangelosi teaches students to respect individuality, use precise language, and refrain from making assumptions about others.

State and national standards require teachers to address reading, writing, speaking, and listening in their lessons, but speaking and listening are sometimes “covered” by having students answer questions orally or assigning them to work in small groups. The kind of communication that Cangelosi talks about really *teaches* students how what we say and how we say it can mean the difference between a peaceful or a combative situation.

A companion to lessons on assertive communication is instruction in conflict resolution. Emphasizing that the English classroom is

the perfect place to integrate anti-violence teaching into the curriculum, Rosemarie Coghlan demonstrates how teaching conflict resolution strategies through the study of literature and encouraging “academic controversy” through cooperative learning can help students discover nonviolent ways of handling conflict that will translate to their personal lives. In “The Teaching of Anti-Violence Strategies within the English Curriculum,” Coghlan explains how she teaches students to live peacefully in a violent world and how they can work to improve it. Determining whether a literary character’s response is submissive, aggressive, or assertive helps students make connections to the conflicts in their own lives, and role-playing responses to specific conflicts brings the realization that people have choices in their mode of response. Having students formulate “peace contracts” based on the conflicts of literary characters is another method that Coghlan uses to achieve her goals. To those who would complain that this kind of teaching takes time away from the academic curriculum, Coghlan responds with a firm “not so.” Integration is the key, and though this takes work on the teacher’s part, the instruction is vital to students trying to cope with a violent world.

The kind of role playing that Coghlan describes is similar to Daniel Mindich’s method of using simulations in his classroom, though his is a more concentrated approach. In “The Ada Valley Simulation,” Mindich creates a society, the Ada Valley, where students are confronted with the issue of differences among various groups. Through role-play they are forced to deal with a society in which no groups are clearly good or bad and political correctness and racism do not exist. Yet the groups have disparate lifestyles that put them in conflict with one another, and they must deal with these problems. The simulation is followed by a debriefing in which students and teacher discuss what happened and why, making connections to real-life situations.

Using simulations to illuminate the real world can put a human face on difference, as Linda W. Rees describes in her piece, “A Thousand Cranes: A Curriculum of Peace.” Using as her example a young Japanese girl who transferred to the private school where Rees teaches, Rees describes both the acceptance and the rejection of this student by her peers and the examination by Rees and her students of the reasons for this behavior. Concluding that sometimes peace is taught *to* us rather than *by* us, she demonstrates the value of students as peacemakers. Like the other teachers whose pieces are included in this section, Rees understands that peace must begin at home and that students learn best through authentic experience. Examining their behavior in a real-life classroom situation taps the same critical thinking skills

required of students in the analysis of literature, but the learning is so much more meaningful.

Writing, too, has an important place in a curriculum of peace. Colleen A. Ruggieri shows how carefully constructed writing assignments can give students a voice and promote better understanding of differences. Instead of just “studying works written by others,” she suggests providing students opportunities for growth through personal research and enriched writing assignments. She tells of a student who, on being disciplined by her for injuring another student in class, threatened to murder her, chop her body parts into pieces, and mail them to each of her family members. “Teens are screaming—and killing—in an effort to be heard by society,” she says. In an effort to teach tolerance and understanding, she gives students multiple opportunities for personal writing, much like G. Lynn Nelson describes in “Warriors with Words.”

But Ruggieri goes further with creative writing assignments of various types, including a personal research paper. Ken Macrorie is well known for writing about the I-Search paper back in the 1980s, and Tom Romano has published several recent books touting the value of the multigenre paper, which allows for personal exploration and multiple voices. Ruggieri builds on these ideas by giving her students opportunities to explore their lives, resolve personal issues through research, write about these issues, and share their discoveries with others in the class. She is quick to point out that she knows she can’t save the world through her efforts, but she also knows that what goes on, however briefly, in the English classroom can extend far into the community and the world.

Like Colleen Ruggieri, David Gill experienced a situation in his school that started him wondering how to teach for peace. The number and severity of student fights had increased, and teachers could no longer break them up without risking attack themselves. After one particularly vicious fight that resulted in vandalized classrooms and a computer being thrown down a crowded hallway, Gill was shocked that students took it all in stride and barely talked about the melee the next day. It seemed they had become accustomed to violence, and some of them even enjoyed watching it occur.

After doing extensive research, Gill came upon some teaching materials that used the works of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi to teach adolescents about the philosophy behind nonviolence. He describes these materials extensively in his piece and also gives an example of a Bill of Rights for Students that his class designed as a culminating project, which included such things as “the right to be safe”

and “the right to not be afraid.” If such teaching can prevent even one student from being involved in a violent act, or prompt a student to prevent a violent act from occurring, it’s worth all the time and effort required. Gill ends his piece with an anecdote that illustrates this observation exactly.

As we consider the role of popular culture in our curricula, we can’t ignore the presence of Hip-hop in our students’ lives. Heather E. Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis share their attempt to develop a Hip-hop-influenced slam poetry unit that teaches for peace. They explain how their reluctant students latched onto Hip-hop as a means of expressing themselves and how reading, discussion, and freewrites served as inspiration. Their primary goal in relating their experience is to help prepare teachers to work with students different from themselves as they teach for peace.

Some critics see Hip-hop as a *source* of violence, with its sometimes crude lyrics and dangerous exhortations, but Bruce and Davis make clear what is acceptable and what is not while still allowing for the essence of the genre itself. They work with students to help them express their emotions verbally rather than acting on violent impulse. The authors note that while emotional development is usually supported for girls, it is discouraged for boys, and that research has shown “a high correlation between lack of facility with verbal expression and aggression and delinquency.” Of special note is the authors’ admission of the difficulties they encountered working together across cultural boundaries with few models for accomplishing their goals. Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Geneva Smitherman’s publications on language rights, as well as Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* and Mary Rose O’Reilley’s *The Peaceable Classroom* are just some of the underpinnings of their work.

After the events of September 11, 2001, many teachers struggled with the issue of how to continue teaching while still acknowledging and honoring their students’ grief, fear, and frustration in the face of an appalling act of violence. Vasiliki Antzoulis, who on that day was a student teacher at Manhattan’s Stuyvesant High School, describes how her students, who witnessed the horror, “ran for their lives up the West Side Highway.” Later, once they were relocated to a school in Brooklyn, she wondered how she could teach through this tragedy. “How could I go in and teach alliteration to students who had just witnessed people jumping out of the 110th story of the World Trade Center?” she asks. But teach she did, creating a poetry unit that allowed her students to express their fears and examine their feelings. In her piece

“Writing to Heal, Understand, and Cope,” Antzoulis shows us how she turned a horrific experience into an opportunity to deal with pain through reading and writing poetry. As we confront another kind of war—terrorism and counterterrorism—teachers will continue to seek ways to help students cope with violence.

The final piece in this section, and indeed in this entire collection, may be surprising in its content. Marion Wrye’s “The Silent Classroom” suggests a possible antidote to the violence with which students must live every day. In an effort to combat the external power on students of often-violent forces such as technology and the media, Wrye rationalizes and describes her efforts to allow her students the silence they need to gradually realize the shift from external to internal power. Likening her technique to that of the horse whisperer, she attempts to ease the weight of our culture on students’ psychology and spirit, helping them realize a more peaceful existence. “We strain at the gnats of scores and standards and curricula and methodologies,” she says, “and swallow the camels of wholesale demoralization and alienation.” Wrye notes that when she allowed students their silences, they appreciated one another’s work more and developed a deeper sense of classroom community. How often do we allow our students to be silent in our classrooms—other than when they are reading an assignment or taking a test? What role does silence play in a curriculum of peace?

At this writing, a fragile cease-fire in the Middle East has once again been shattered by terrorists who prefer death and destruction over peace. Two disgruntled employees in different states have killed several co-workers because they felt alienated and mistreated. A drive-by shooting has killed a three-year-old child in a neighborhood troubled by gang fights. And thousands of children are heading back to school for a fresh start to the new academic year. We want them and their teachers to be safe, just as we want the killing in our neighborhoods and other parts of the world to stop. We can wring our hands and lament the sad state of the world, or we can decide to take a step toward peace, however small, by making a difference in our classrooms.

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