

## **Title: Civil war in Sierra Leone: child soldiers and blood diamonds**

**Overview:** This lesson will be part of a larger unit on Africa using the civil war in Sierra Leone to illustrate the problem of children forced to be soldiers and the use of diamonds to finance the war. Before beginning this lesson students should be familiar with the countries in western Africa; their geography, history and relationship to each other, information can be gathered using a geography textbook or through searching the internet. Students will be asked to draw conclusions about the impact of a 10 year civil war on the people of this country, as well as the impact of this war on a boy who lived through it. The realities of war are tragic; students may be shocked by the violence especially when carried out by a child about their age. The lesson can be extended to take a look at the United Nations Special Court which is now conducting the trials of those “believed to be most responsible” for the atrocities or at what organizations like the United Nations and Amnesty International are doing to change the plight of children and to keep blood diamonds off the market. The connection to my students and my school is that a graduate from our high school is now doing an internship at the United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown, Sierra Leone and will be coming back to do some follow-up speaking engagements. She will spend some time in my classroom sharing her experiences with my students. Even without this speaker much can be gleaned from using this study of Sierra Leone and the reading of the book by Ishmael Beah to explore the concepts of civil war, conflict diamonds, and child soldiers in a developing country of Africa. The movie “Blood Diamonds” starring Leonardo Di Caprio is another tie-in that may be used depending on the age of the students involved. The teacher should view the movie as background preparation and may show clips that are age appropriate.

### **Minnesota Social Studies Standards:**

- **V. GEOGRAPHY**
  - B. Essential Skills
    - 2. The student will understand the regional distribution of the human population at local to global scales and its patterns of change.
      - #3. Students will use population pyramids and birth and death rates to compare and contrast the characteristics of regional populations at various scales.
- **V. GEOGRAPHY**
  - B. Essential Skills
    - 1. The student will use maps, globes, geographic information systems, and other databases to answer geographic questions at a variety of scales from local to global.
      - #2. Students will provide examples that illustrate the impact changing birth and death rates have on the growth of the human population in the major regions of the world.
- **V. GEOGRAPHY**
  - E. Essential Skills
    - 1. The student will use maps, globes, geographic information systems and other sources of information to analyze the natures of places at a variety of scales.
      - #1. Students will demonstrate the ability to obtain geographic information form a variety of print and electronic sources.
- **V. GEOGRAPHY**
  - C. Spatial Organization
    - 2. The student will explain how the regionalization of space into political units affects human behavior.

#1. Students will understand the concept of nationalism and of sovereign political states and how sovereignty is impacted by international agreements.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will understand the location, major landforms, and general geography of Sierra Leone and West Africa.
2. Students will understand the effects of the recent civil war in terms of conflict diamonds.
3. Students will explore the use of child soldiers forced to fight the war in Sierra Leone; not an uncommon occurrence in African countries.
4. Students will analyze the connection between conflict diamonds and Ishmael's story.
5. Students will analyze country statistics to compare birth and death rates between Sierra Leone, her neighbors, and other countries in the western hemisphere.
6. Students will draw conclusions on the impact of the 10 year civil war on the people in the country of Sierra Leone.
7. Students will draw conclusions about their life in the United States and the lives of people their ages in the countries included in the research piece.

**Grade Level:** Middle School – grades 8, 9; May be modified for other grades

**Time required:** 4-5 class periods

**Subject(s)/topic(s):** Geography; History; Civics

**Required materials:**

Computer access for readings

Computer lab access for statistical analysis

Handout 1: Sierra Leone pre-assessment

Handout 2: [http://www.alongwaygone.com/media/ALongWayGone\\_Excerpt.pdf](http://www.alongwaygone.com/media/ALongWayGone_Excerpt.pdf)

This is chapter 1 of a book by Ishmael Beah and his experience as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.

Handout 3: <http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/11/22/diamond.history/> (article)

Handout 4: <http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/lesson.plans/11/22/diamond.history>

(discussion questions) This is an article about the use of conflict diamonds to finance buying weapons to be used in fighting a war.

Handout 5: GIS data sheet. This is used to collect data on birth rates and death rates as well as other statistics to compare countries in Western Africa, Northeastern South America and some other more well developed countries.

Handout 6: <http://atozteacherstuff.com/pdf.htm?cubeoutline.pdf> This cube can be used if choosing the Bloom's summary cube option on day 4.

Handout 7: Sierra Leone post-assessment

**Suggested Procedure:**

Day 1:

1. Post the following pictures: a suggestion would be to copy and paste these to a word document and then enlarge them to 8 ½ by 11 sizes. I mounted them on construction paper and held them up in front of the room; they could also be passed around.



2. Do a “Think – Pair – Share” activity. Have students think about answers to the questions; then pair up with someone else in the class and share their ideas; then discuss with the class as a whole.
3. Discussion questions:
  - What is happening?
  - Why do you think this is happening?
  - Where do you think this is happening?
  - Do you notice some things in the pictures that don’t seem to “fit”? (i.e. Pink teddy bear backpack)
4. Access the reading at [http://www.alongwaygone.com/media/ALongWayGone\\_Excerpt.pdf](http://www.alongwaygone.com/media/ALongWayGone_Excerpt.pdf) to read the story of a boy forced to become a soldier. Read aloud in class. Have students HUG the text by highlighting the main ideas, underlining the important details, and writing important points, ideas, and vocabulary in their own words. \*Make copies for each student if possible so they can make their notes on the copy.
5. After the reading have the students answer the following questions in their notebook:
  - Before the war started, what were some ways that Ishmael’s life was similar to yours?
  - In what ways was his life different than yours?
  - How was Ishmael’s life different from some of his friends?
6. Assignment for the next day: Re-read the excerpt using the HUG strategy, see if you would add/change any of your work from before. Again look at the questions, see if there is anything you could add to your answers.

#### Day 2:

1. Start the class by doing a “whip”. Go around the room with each person saying something they learned from yesterday’s lesson.
2. Ask students what they know about diamonds and put those ideas up on the board. Have a short discussion about why diamonds are desirable, what do they associate with diamonds, and do they know anyone who has diamonds.
3. Hand out the article. Have students fill in a graphic organizer of your creation or they can make their own if they are familiar with them. The topic should be diamonds, they should then draw lines radiating out that explain the topic. An example might be that some diamonds (main topic) are conflict diamonds (first circle), then conflict diamonds are used to finance war (drawn from the first circle). They should include unfamiliar vocabulary words they need to define, problems and possible solutions.
7. Read aloud the following article.  
<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/11/22/diamond.history/> (article)  
<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/lesson.plans/11/22/diamond.history>  
 (discussion questions)
8. Students will answer the questions at the end of the article, discuss the questions and answers.
9. Allow students a few minutes at the end of the class period to journal about their feelings related to Ishmael’s story and what they have learned about conflict diamonds. Ask students to analyze the connection between what they know about conflict diamonds and Ishmael’s story.

Day 3:

1. Activate prior knowledge by asking students to write a list of observations in their notebooks to each of the following questions based on what they have learned the last couple of days.
  - What connection did you see between conflict diamonds and Ishmael's story?
  - How would you describe life in Sierra Leone during the civil war based on what you have read over the last couple of days?
  - How is life in Sierra Leone different from yours?
2. Ask students to save their lists until tomorrow so they can use them in the follow up activity.
3. Access the GIS data sheet included with this lesson.
4. Students will need computer access to complete this part of the lesson. Students should access the CIA Fact book at [www.Ciafactbook.gov](http://www.Ciafactbook.gov)
5. The teacher may need to define a few of the terms and concepts included in the student's research depending on the proficiency level of the students.
6. Students should research the information for each of the countries listed. They will be comparing countries in western Africa, northeastern South America, as well as Great Britain and the United States.
7. Have the students fill in the information on the chart for each of the countries listed. Depending on the amount of time available students may have to do the compare/contrast and the essay as homework or extra time may be given in class the next day.
8. Students will then compare and contrast the birth and death rates, infant mortality, life expectancy and literacy rates in the countries listed. Teacher should decide how much time is needed to complete this part of the assignment.
9. Students will write a 1-2 page essay comparing and contrasting these statistics. Students should draw conclusions about life in these different areas while hypothesizing about similarities and differences between their lives and kids their age in these areas.

Day 4:

1. Play the Jon Stewart (Comedy Central) interview with Ishmael Beah. (about 3-5 minutes long)  
[http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/player.jhtml?ml\\_video=82274&ml\\_collection=&ml\\_gateway=&ml\\_gateway\\_id=&ml\\_comedian=&ml\\_runtime=&ml\\_context=show&ml\\_origin\\_url=%2Fmotherload%2F%3Flnk%3Dv%26ml\\_video%3D82274&ml\\_playlist=&lnk=&is\\_large=true](http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/player.jhtml?ml_video=82274&ml_collection=&ml_gateway=&ml_gateway_id=&ml_comedian=&ml_runtime=&ml_context=show&ml_origin_url=%2Fmotherload%2F%3Flnk%3Dv%26ml_video%3D82274&ml_playlist=&lnk=&is_large=true)  
\*It may be easier to go to [www.comedycentral.com](http://www.comedycentral.com) and research under videos for Ishmael Beah interview.
2. Students will do a carousel brainstorming activity. There will be poster size sheets of paper up on the walls around the room. Divide the students into groups of about 4-5 students. Each group starts out at one of the stations. While at that station they should brainstorm in their group the answer to the question, each group must add something that isn't on the list. When the teacher calls time, or the music stops, the groups will move one station clockwise. This will continue until the groups are at the station where they started. Once back to their original station the groups will look analyze all the contributions to the question and develop a summary statement (2-3 sentences) and write that summary at the bottom of the paper. (If there isn't room, fold the paper up half way and write on the back side.) Each of the groups will then share their summary.

3. Questions:

- How did Ishmael’s life change as a result of the civil war?
- What are some problems with using children as soldiers?
- What are “blood diamonds”, how did they get that name, and how are they used?
- What has happened to the country of Sierra Leone as a result of the civil war? (What do you know about Sierra Leone?)
- What can be done to make sure that blood diamonds don’t end up on the market?

Alternate station topics:

- Africa
- Sierra Leone
- Blood Diamonds
- Child soldiers
- Civil War

4. An alternate activity that could be done in groups:

Students would be assigned to groups to complete a Bloom’s Summary Cube. The teacher would hand out blank, flat cube outlines; making sure that each side is about six inches to each group. The groups would work together to complete the cubes with the following information:

- Cube outline – size may need to be adjusted:  
<http://atozteacherstuff.com/pdf.htm?cubeoutline.pdf>
- Side 1: create a graphic organizer to answer the following questions on the topic of diamonds:
  - What percentage of diamonds are conflict or “blood” diamonds?
  - What role do diamonds play in the wars in Africa?
  - What have they done to try to stop the sale of conflict or “blood” diamonds?
  - What percentage of jewelry sales are diamonds, what is the dollar value of those sales?
- Side 2: Find or draw pictures that illustrate the use of diamonds to finance wars in Africa.
- Side 3: Create a map of Sierra Leone that includes information relevant to the topic, the capital/major cities and the diamond mines.
- Side 4: Students will investigate problems created for Sierra Leone during the civil war. Compare and contrast life before, during, and after the war.
- Side 5: Students will design a “peace poster”, create a slogan, or write a poem or rap song with possible solutions or ways we can help or make a difference for the people in Sierra Leone.

\*Ask groups to share what is on their cube, hang cubes in the classroom.

**Follow up activity:**

1. Teacher will present information on:

[http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what\\_rights\\_flyer\\_english.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what_rights_flyer_english.pdf)

- United Nations Article 38 that says children under age 15 should not be part of the armed forces
- United Nations Article 39 that says governments have a responsibility to rehabilitate child soldiers

1. Students will write a letter to Amnesty International. In their letter they will ask for more information on child soldiers and/or blood diamonds.
2. Invite a local jeweler to visit the class and talk about where their diamonds come from, how they are graded, and how they make sure that their diamonds come from a “safe” part of the world.

### **Extensions:**

- Co-op with the language arts department and read the whole book as a joint assignment. Create vocabulary word lists for students to define as well as questions to answer for each chapter.
- If resources are available in your area consider holding a panel discussion hosted by your students on the topics related to Sierra Leone.
- Watch the movie “Blood Diamonds” or parts of the movie depending on the age of the students. The movie is graphic in its war scenes so be sure to preview the movie and show only age appropriate parts.

### **Resources:**

<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/africa/01/18/diamonds.overview/index.html>  
Great background article on the use of diamonds to finance weapons to fight the civil war in Sierra Leone. Also great links to other information.

<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/africa/05/24/sierra.leone/index.html> “Diamonds are Sierra Leone War’s best friend” Back ground information on the war.

[http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2000/08/00\\_beah\\_good-bad.html](http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2000/08/00_beah_good-bad.html) “When Good Comes From Bad” by Ishmael Beah about his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1584807-1,00.html> “Pop Culture finds Lost Boys” Background information on Ishmael Beah and his reemergence into society.

[http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/player.jhtml?ml\\_video=82274&ml\\_collection=&ml\\_gateway=&ml\\_gateway\\_id=&ml\\_comedian=&ml\\_runtime=&ml\\_context=show&ml\\_origin\\_url=%2Fmotherload%2F%3Fink%3Dv%26ml\\_video%3D82274&ml\\_playlist=&lnk=&is\\_large=true](http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/player.jhtml?ml_video=82274&ml_collection=&ml_gateway=&ml_gateway_id=&ml_comedian=&ml_runtime=&ml_context=show&ml_origin_url=%2Fmotherload%2F%3Fink%3Dv%26ml_video%3D82274&ml_playlist=&lnk=&is_large=true)  
e Ishmael Beah interview with Jon Stewart

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16930458/site/newsweek/> \*Also includes a picture gallery that may be used with students.

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone\\_30628.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_30628.html)

[http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/sowc06\\_table5.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/sowc06_table5.pdf) Statistical information from countries may be used with the GIS data sheet and essay piece.

[http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/figure2\\_3.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/figure2_3.pdf) statistical information may be used with the data piece.

[http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what\\_rights\\_flyer\\_english.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/magic/media/documents/what_rights_flyer_english.pdf) “Children Have Rights and Needs” UNICEF Human Rights Education materials

<http://www.unicefusa.org/atf/cf/%7BB35DBA70-2A32-4E25-999B-FA3A590864DB%7D/MarthaMS.pdf> “Martha’s Story -the impact of armed conflict” lesson plans about a girl from Sierra Leone.

[http://www.unicefusa.org/site/c.duLRI8O0H/b.2108965/k.6327/TeachUNICEF\\_Lesson\\_Plans\\_TeachUNICEF\\_Youth\\_Action\\_US\\_Fund\\_for\\_UNICEF.htm](http://www.unicefusa.org/site/c.duLRI8O0H/b.2108965/k.6327/TeachUNICEF_Lesson_Plans_TeachUNICEF_Youth_Action_US_Fund_for_UNICEF.htm) Lesson plans prepared by UNICEF.

<http://www.sc-sl.org/specialcourtmadesimple.pdf> Information about the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Redress – Seeking Reparations for Torture Survivors.

**Assessment:** Students will be assessed using the pre and post assessment quiz. They will also be graded on their answers to the questions asked about the reading from A Long Way Gone, the article on blood diamonds, their GIS data sheet and their essay on comparing the statistics of the various countries and their insights into what life would be like in those countries.

**Credits:** This lesson was prepared and developed by Sharon Grafstrom who teaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade geography and 9<sup>th</sup> grade civics at Roseau High School, Roseau Minnesota as part of the 2007 MAGE Summer Institute – Making Geography Authentic.