

Students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin protest the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Planting Seeds of Solidarity

Weaving World Justice Issues into the Elementary Classroom

BY BOB PETERSON

My fifth-grade students love stories. Almost every day after lunch I light a candle, turn off the lights, and read or tell a story. If something interferes with story time, I receive a chorus of complaints.

One of the stories I use to start my students' study of globalization issues is from my own teenage experience when I lived in Cairo, Egypt in the mid-1960s. I tell them that I lived in Cairo among pyramids and sphinxes, close to the world's longest river, the Nile. I attended a middle school with kids from all over the world, in an old palace of former King Farouk of Egypt. Because my family was from the United States and my father had a good job as a soil scientist,

we lived comfortably in a suburban home south of Cairo.

I had many adventures — riding horses and camels by the Great Pyramids of Cheops, visiting Tutankhamen's tomb in the Valley of the Kings, swimming in the Red Sea — but one incident stands out in my memory.

One sunny afternoon my family got into our blue 1965 Ford station wagon and drove 20 kilometers south of Cairo to climb a lesser known pyramid called the Red Pyramid. My mother had packed a lunch in our cooler, including some cans of imported diet soda for my diabetic brother, Don.

We picnicked in an isolated spot in the desert

a ways from the Red Pyramid. By the time we finished, a small group of children had gathered around our car and they called out in Arabic, "Baksheesh! Baksheesh!" They wanted a tip — money. Their little hands poked through the open car windows, begging.

We did not give money to the kids — U.S. tourists were "not encouraged" to do so — but we did "give" them something. As we were leaving we threw out the window my brother's two empty aluminum cans. "They want them for a toy," my father said as we drove away. The children screamed with joy. I looked out the back window as we slowly drove toward the pyramid. The children were piled on top of the cans, fighting to be owner of their newfound playthings.

We hiked to the top of the pyramid's peak, but my thoughts remained focused on the children fighting over what I had thrown away. Why was I destined to be the one in the car tossing junk to poor kids, instead of the one who was begging for a penny or an empty can?

Why?

Using simple stories to raise profound questions is among the oldest and best of teaching techniques. It is also an essential strategy in my teaching about globalization issues.

I view teaching about globalization and world justice issues much as I view issues of multicultural education. They need to be both woven throughout the curriculum and highlighted in specific lessons. This approach is necessary in part to find the time to teach about the issues, given all that elementary teachers are expected to cover. But also I find that an integrated approach helps motivate students, and teaches them that these are central issues that cannot be dealt with in one or two activities. As a result, my lessons in math, science, social studies, writing, reading, current events — even discipline discussions — all have a world justice and multicultural theme woven throughout.

The story from my year in Egypt provokes thoughtful comments and questions among students. They express surprise that some children have so little and they wonder what life is like for children around the world. "I can't believe kids actually wanted just an old can," I recall a student saying. A response from another stu-

dent stressed our commonality: "I believe it. Every kid wants to play!"

PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH

Throughout my classroom discussions on globalization, I pose more questions, not so much in search of a specific answer, but for all of us to think about: How are our lives different from theirs? How are they similar? What do people in the United States have to learn from people in other countries? Why does chance allow for some to live a life of relative luxury while others don't know where their next meal is coming from? And what might we do about such things?

There's no doubt that global problems are complex. However, even with elementary children there is no reason to unnecessarily simplify

things. Questioning or problem-posing is an effective means to keep discussions both interesting and complicated.

Early in the year, I use Tracy Chapman's song *Why?* to pose questions. Chapman asks, for example: "Why do the babies starve when there's enough food to feed the world?" I give my students a copy of the lyrics (as I do with dozens of songs and poems we use in the classroom) to keep in a special three-ring binder, so that they might

refer to them throughout the year.

Needless to say, we don't answer Chapman's "Why?" We note it, sometimes adding it to the spiral notebook hanging on the wall entitled "Questions We Have." I ask students what answers to Chapman's questions might be, and we note them as well. Ideas usually include a range of possibilities: lack of food, no jobs, too many people, war, drugs, and lazy people. I tell my students that this is but one example of the important questions we will ponder in fifth grade.

In the beginning weeks, I also share a few basic statistics from UNICEF, including the fact that about 30,000 children die daily from malnutrition and preventable illness. I ask my class, "How many schools with the same student population as ours would it take to equal the number of children who die each day?" This helps make the large number meaningful, and usually surprises the students at the depth of the problem. I also share that approximately 130 million

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children do not attend elementary school, 1.1 billion people have no access to safe drinking water, and 3 billion lack adequate sanitation facilities.

I tell students that we are going to try to not just feel sorry or sympathy for those people, but to develop "solidarity." I have a student look up the word "solidarity" in the dictionary and they find that it means "unity, based on a community of interests." We discuss what unity means and I ask, "What do you have in common with the kids who we're talking about?"

"We all need to eat," a student might respond. "We have to breathe!" So it goes, with kids usu-

ally identifying basic needs. I ask: "What are the basic needs of all humans, particularly children?" Working sometimes in small groups and sometimes as the entire class, students come up with food, shelter, clothes, water, schools, doctors, and toys. We discuss whether items are a basic need or a "desire." For example, some classes have decided that while toys may not be a basic need for children, playing is. Out of such a discussion comes more questions,

such as: "What would it feel like if your basic needs were not met?" "How many kids don't have their basic needs met?" "Is anyone doing something to help kids who don't have their basic needs met?" I encourage students to look up "children's rights" and "human rights" in our school library and on the Internet. One book that kids find is *A Children's Chorus* published by UNICEF (see Resources, p. 378). This beautifully illustrated book goes through the ten principles contained in the 1959 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of a Child.

As a follow-up activity to Chapman's song and the rights of children discussion, I occasionally have children in small groups choose different rights out of a hat and improvise short skits to show the class what those rights are. Again, the question I pose is: "Why? Why do some kids have these and others don't? How can we express solidarity with those kids, instead of just feeling sorry?"

Helping students recognize there is a commonality to such problems helps lay the groundwork for developing attitudes of solidarity that go beyond mere charity.

OVERCOMING THE 'US VS. THEM' DICHOTOMY

One challenge is to make sure that from the very start, such immense problems are not seen as "foreign," only occurring among "others." Thus I like to start my in-depth study of world justice issues at home. Some of my students bring to class certain stereotypes about the rest of the world, especially stereotypes they have gotten from TV and the media. Starting with problems in this country acts to counter stereotypes of "poor" Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It also centers the children in something that is familiar to many of them: poverty and homelessness in the United States.

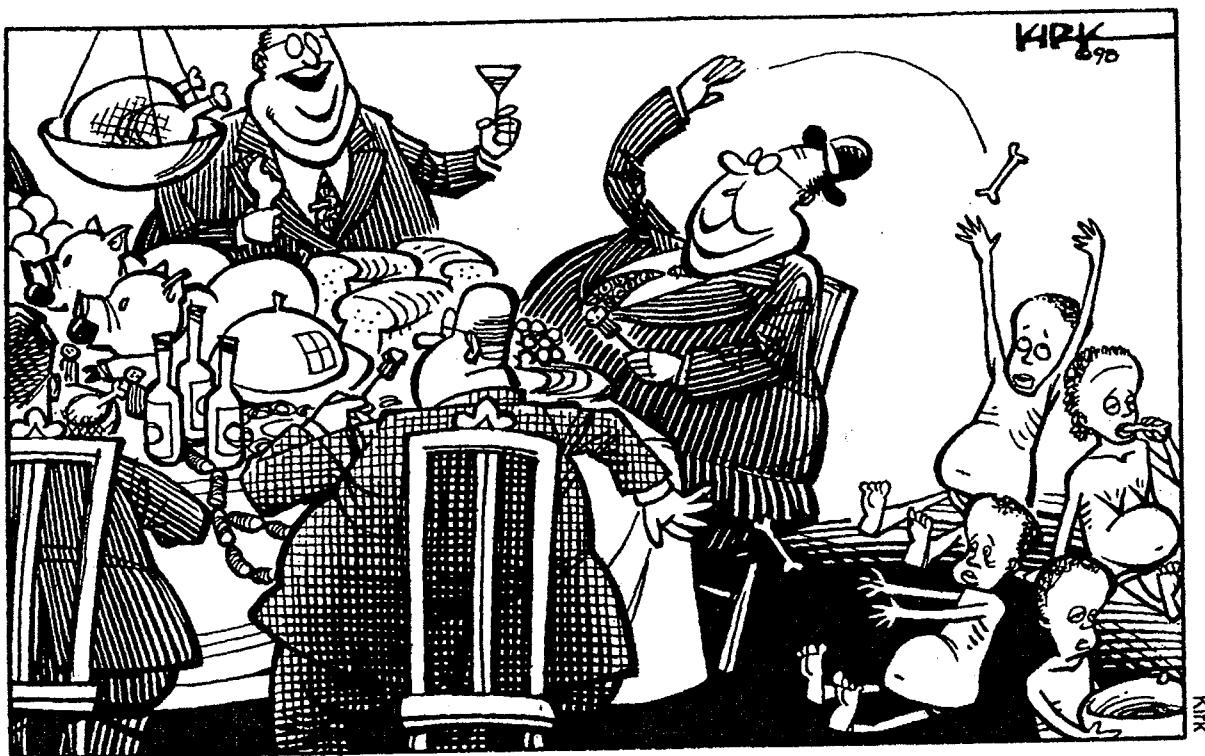
One of my first reading/language arts units is on homelessness in the United States. I begin by displaying on my overhead projector a photo of a snowy scene in front of the White House. Before showing the caption I ask students to make observations. They ultimately are surprised that what they guessed were snow-covered rocks or garbage are actually sleeping homeless people. (The photo is reproduced on p. 32 of *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 1*.) As with other photos I use, we make observations, talk about how we feel, connect it to what we already know, ask why the situation exists, and think about what might be done.

EVICITION STORIES

After this introduction, we take a few days to read Sharon Bell Mathis' *Sidewalk Story*, which tells of a family being evicted from its apartment and the role of a nine-year-old neighbor girl in fighting the eviction. Throughout my entire curriculum I try to highlight times when individuals and groups saw their interests tied to the interests of others, and acted on those convictions. We also read Langston Hughes' "Ballad of the Landlord" and Lucille Clifton's poem "Eviction," and write some of our own poems.

I share news stories that talk of the continuing poverty in the United States and the intense poverty in some places overseas. I find it beneficial to begin with discussion of U.S. poverty because it is close to home and virtually all my students have stories to tell about homeless people who are relatives, or whom they encounter in their neighborhoods or when they travel.

During these discussions, I occasionally find that some of my own students or members of their families are homeless. Because the stories and poetry I use portray homelessness as main-



AN EXPANDING FREE MARKET EXTENDS all BELLIES

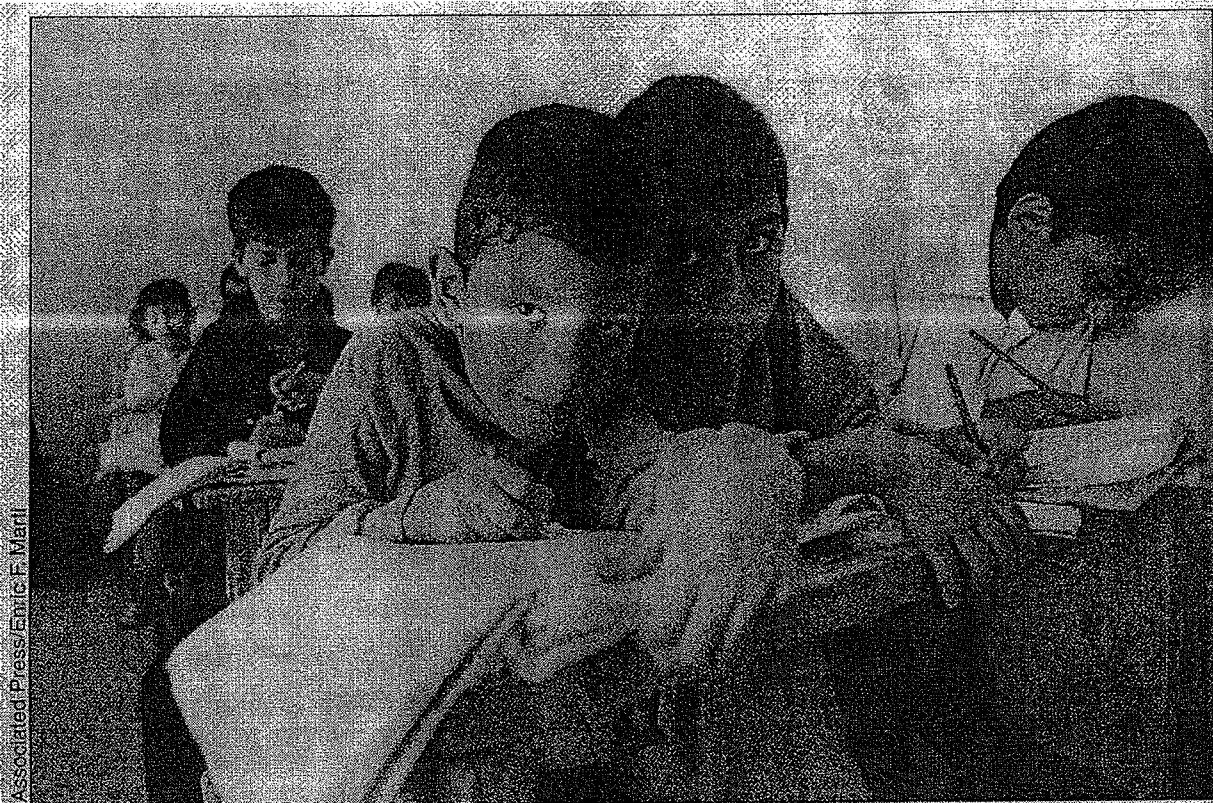
ly a social problem — not something to be ashamed of, my homeless students are usually willing to describe their situation. Their classmates listen with respectful curiosity.

One year a student explained that during summer his house burned down and that he was living in a motel room with several other family members. Once he shared the story, his classmates were more sensitive to some of his moods and needs. One student assisted him in co-writing a dialogue poem between a small home (the motel room) and a big home (the apartment where his family finally relocated). "We are both homes," the poem started, and then the "little house" says, "Lots of kids have to sleep in the same bed and room," while the big house responds, "Every kid has their own room in me." The little house goes on to say, "Friends can't visit because I'm too small," while the big house responds, "Lots of friends can visit me because we have lots of space."

After children gain some basic background about conditions in the United States, I feel more comfortable exploring poverty and injustice in other countries. Helping students recognize there is a commonality to such problems helps lay the groundwork for developing attitudes of solidarity that go beyond mere charity. In other

words, I want students to recognize patterns in world problems and how those patterns are connected to problems in our own communities and country. Then students are more likely to begin to understand that working for global justice also involves changing "our" world as well, and that when we help to change conditions for "others" we are helping to change them for ourselves.

I try to help my students develop a feeling of solidarity through understanding the often expressed notion that "no person is an island," or, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it so eloquently: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This is no simple task in a culture that glorifies individual consumption as a vehicle to personal satisfaction. My students are little different than many U.S. youths — 65% of whom have TVs in their bedrooms and who watch on average nearly 25 hours of TV a week and more than 20,000 television commercials a year. The materialism and narrow individualism promoted in the ads are obstacles to students beginning to think about their interests in more social, collective terms. One message students will never hear from a commercial is: "Think about the people who make the things you buy. What conditions do they work under, what are



Associated Press/Emile F. Marli

Three students cram into a desk designed for two at an elementary school in Baghdad, Iraq, which constantly struggles to provide enough desks, books, and school supplies for all its students.

they paid, how could you help improve their lives?"

In one activity, I place a shopping bag in front of the class and ask the students to guess what's inside. As their guesses get more accurate I take out a T-shirt, a McDonald's Happy Meal toy, and a Nike shoe. I then ask how far these items have traveled. Initial responses are, "from McDonald's" or "from the store." As I question students, it becomes clear to them that the items were made somewhere else — somewhere much farther away.

I have a student come up and read where each item is from; we then locate the country on the world map. We talk about where other things are from as we examine backpacks, shoes, and clothing. For homework, students do a "Where Are My Things From?" activity (see p. 140), in which they list at least 10 household items, the brand name, and where they are made. The next day students share lists and label and color maps indicating the origins of their common things.

SWEATSHOP CONDITIONS

To probe the reality behind the Made in Honduras or Made in Indonesia labels, I show the video *When Children Do the Work* (see "Videos

With a Global Conscience," p. 365), which graphically portrays the harsh conditions of sweatshops and how some children are robbed of their childhood. The first segment of the video is an excerpt from the National Labor Committee's *Zoned for Slavery* video which describes sweatshop conditions in garment factories in El Salvador and Honduras. The video's narrator explains that a Gap shirt made in El Salvador sells in the United States for \$20, but the workers receive just 12¢. "Who gets the other \$19.88?" the narrator demands. I later use these and other statistics for story problems in math.

The second segment of the video examines child workers in Pakistan. A carpet factory manager explains that he has 40 looms worked by 100 children and that "we chain them three or four hours a day to teach it not to run away." Yes, the manager says "it" when referring to children. He adds that the children also sleep chained to their looms. My students are repelled by scenes of such oppression, but inspired by the story of Iqbal Masih, a child worker who became an activist with the Bonded Labor Liberation Front and who was killed under suspicious circumstances (see p. 206).

The final segment shows the Women's Network of the United Food and Commercial Workers union leafleting a Wal-Mart store, protesting the sale of products made by eight- to twelve-year-olds in Bangladesh. The workers explain why such practices are both morally wrong and an attack on working people in this country. I remind my students of newspaper articles we've read about area companies moving to places of cheap labor, putting area workers out of work. This reinforces my emphasis on building a sense of solidarity with others around the world who are fighting economic oppression.

To further deepen children's understanding of their interconnectedness to conditions around the world, I use Bernice Reagon's song *Are My Hands Clean?* It tells the story of a blouse created from the labor and resources of El Salvador, Venezuela, Trinidad, Haiti, South Carolina, and New Jersey. The children trace the route of the blouse and its raw materials on a map, and contrast the wages of the workers described in the song.

When I first used this song I assumed that children would easily get the message of connectedness and potential responsibility the title implies. No such luck. After playing the song I ask, "What does 'Are my hands clean?' really mean?" I receive a range of responses including "The workers' hands get dirty in those sweatshops;" "All those chemicals in the shirts must dirty our hands;" "Because it's been everywhere we should wash the shirts before we wear them or our hands will get dirty;" and "Maybe we're responsible for how those people have to work so hard because we buy the clothing." I tell students that the expression "to wash one's hands of something" means to take no responsibility and I ask, "What would it mean to make our hands clean?"

I have also found using poems that make comparisons and show contrast to be helpful. They reinforce similarities between people and yet highlight conflicts and inequalities that need to be explored. I use a dialogue poem as one model (see *Rethinking Our Classrooms*, Volume 1, p. 42, and see p. 152 in this volume) in which two characters talk to each other. Sometimes I use photos of child workers or sweatshop laborers to spark the poetry writing. In pairs students examine the pictures and then write a dialogue poem — between a boss and a worker, between a child worker and child student, between a poor child and a rich child. I also use a specific poem,

Masks, which was written by Cameron Robinson, a former Portland high school student (see p. 135). Robinson's poem starts off: "Michael Jordan flies through the air/ on shoes of unpaid labor," and ends, "The world is full of masks,/ the hard part is seeing beneath them." We read the poem out loud and talk about what "mask" signifies. "We don't think about what we buy sometimes," one student says. "Some people don't know either," added another. "Some don't care what happens." "We don't realize our clothes have been so many other places and have traveled farther than us!" "We should help those people working in sweatshops."

Later the students share their poems, show them to fourth grade students, and post them on a "Stop Child Labor and Sweatshops" bulletin board. Here's a portion of one dialogue poem:

Child Worker

I work 10 hours a day.

I carry things on my head.

I get paid 19¢ an hour.

Child Student

I go to school or play all day.

I carry a book bag on my back.

I get \$5 every Sunday for allowance.

The materialism and narrow individualism promoted in the ads are obstacles to students beginning to think about their interests in more social, collective terms.

THE ROOTS OF INEQUALITY

It's relatively easy to get elementary children to recognize some manifestations of injustice around the world — poverty, hunger, child labor, and sweatshops. What's much more difficult is to get them to understand some of the causes.

I believe that only through understanding something about colonialism will people grasp why the world is divided as it is. On this broad issue of globalization teachers needn't be locked into a strict chronology. I try to grab the interest of the students, first by exploring aspects of today's world, and then ask the question: "How did this get to be like this?"

I use Columbus' encounter with Native Americans as the jumping off point for demonstrating the transfer of wealth from one part of the world to another and the destruction of sustainable Native cultures. Using materials and resources contained in the *Rethinking Schools*



book *Rethinking Columbus*, I have children examine the impact of Columbus' arrival on the Native population. Through stories, poetry, songs, and a role play trial of Columbus, students begin to see the relationship of exploitation that has existed between rich countries and their colonies. In the role play, some students take on the role of Taínos who were among the first to greet Columbus, and talk about how their lands were taken, forests cut down, people killed, and language "taken out of our mouths," all for the sake of making a few people in a European colonial system rich.

Later, as we study the impact of the American Revolution, we look at particular British policies that economically hurt the 13 colonies, with students dramatizing the conflicts between British tax collectors and American colonists. As we study the trans-Atlantic slave trade we read about the devastating effects slavery had on west Africa and the resistance to slavery in the Americas. For example, I use the chapter book *The Captive*, by Joyce Hansen, a fictionalized account of the capture and eventual escape to freedom of Prince Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vass) of western Africa.

Obviously, limited study in an elementary classroom is going to touch on only some of the

factors that have contributed to the distorted development of much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But these broader historical studies provide some background to students about the origin of current global inequalities.

BROADER ECONOMIC ISSUES

I do various activities with students to place child labor and sweatshops in the context of broader economic issues. As part of math class, I have students graph and demonstrate the disparities of wealth between continents (see p. 68). In one activity, I have each of my 25 students represent 240 million people and then spread out to assigned continents on the global map that is painted on our school's playground. I then distribute 25 "treats" (usually cookies) according to the distribution of the world's wealth; the continents of Europe and North America get nearly two-thirds of the wealth, or 17 of the 25 cookies. At times this leads to considerable dissent and even cookie robbery, but also to an emotional learning experience that begins to reveal aspects of the great disparities in the distribution of wealth around the world.

Afterwards, I have students write and reflect on this activity. They invariably express disbelief and outrage. As one student put it: "How come

Asia has so many people and so few cookies, I mean resources?" Often the students representing North America and Europe refuse to share their treats, which other students see as the highest form of selfishness. I then ask, "What would it mean in the real world for North America and Europe to share?"

I also want to show children that even within a country, wealth is not evenly divided. To do so, I use the "Ten Chairs of Inequality" simulation from the group United for a Fair Economy (see p. 115). In this exercise, the U.S. population is divided into tenths and represented by 10 students. The wealth in the United States is represented by 10 chairs in the front of the classroom. We start off with each of the 10 students sitting on one chair — how the country would be if wealth were evenly distributed. I then explain that, according to U.S. government statistics, a mere 10% of the population (represented by one person) occupied seven chairs as of 1998.

This activity elicits considerable conversation. I draw connections to earlier activities on the world distribution of resources, sweatshops, and child labor. This helps students realize that the key isn't just disparities in wealth between different countries, but disparities within countries as well, in particular the United States. By recognizing that great divisions of wealth exist both within our country and throughout the world, students begin to see that problems can have common roots, thus further nourishing the seeds of solidarity. They can begin to see that the problem is not so much a division of wealth and power between countries as it is a division of wealth and power between social classes. The wealthy of, say, Brazil, have more economic interests in common with the wealthy of the United States than they do with the majority of people in their own country.

The second way I deepen the world distribution of wealth activity is to have students read clippings from mainstream and alternative media about global issues. I duplicate appropriate articles for us to read together and for students to keep in their 3-ring binders. These include articles on factories moving from Milwaukee to Mexico in search of cheaper labor, such as Johnson Controls; about religious activists protesting sweatshop-produced clothing; and on demonstrations against the World

If we are not careful, we can easily paint such a bleak picture of the world's problems that all appears hopeless.

Trade Organization. A business page newspaper article as simple as "Shoe Factory to Move 250 Jobs to Mexico" can be very enlightening in the context of the broader study of some of these issues. Students are quick to pick up the direct effect such a runaway factory has on the lives of people in our local community. "They're moving there to make a sweatshop, just like in the video we saw!" exclaims one student. "And people here are going to lose their jobs." Seeds of

solidarity continue to germinate.

My students draw on their own families' experiences as well. Sometimes when we talk about sweatshops the students describe conditions of some of the places that their family members work. One year when workers from a nearby factory were on strike, a group of my students went out with a teacher assistant and interviewed the striking workers (the company spokesperson refused to meet with them). In the conversation that followed, one of my students announced to the class that what the workers were currently earning was more than her mother received at a different job. "Maybe my mom needs to organize a union too," she concluded.

NUANCING EVERYTHING

Things always seem more simple than they really are. Even something as seemingly clear-cut as child labor is not what it may first appear to be. I was reminded of this recently when I discussed writing dialogue poems with my class and gave child labor as one possible topic. Someone suggested writing a dialogue poem between a child worker and a child student, when ten-year-old Terrance raised a concern. He said that he worked every day after school at the local candy store but that it wasn't child labor.

"How long do you work each day?" I asked.

"Three hours and I get paid \$5 an hour."

"That's fifteen dollars a day!" a student called out, evoking a chorus of "ahas" from the rest.

"I know," said Terrance with a wide grin.

"Today is pay day!"

Momentarily at a loss for words, I asked my class if they thought this was a case of child labor. "No!" was the adamant answer. I played devil's advocate and argued that it must be. "Terrance is ten years old and by law is a child."

"He gets paid good!" was one response.

At that point another girl in the class

announced that she worked too, but she didn't get paid at all, but it was still not child labor. "I work for my family," she explained. "What I do is for all of us and I like doing it."

The conversation continued covering considerable territory ranging from discussion of weekly allowance to the barbarities of child labor in certain parts of the world. I couldn't get them to budge on considering Terrance a child laborer. So I challenged them to define child labor. Together they came up with this:

Child labor is when children are forced to work because they don't have any choice. Sometimes children get beaten. Most times they don't get paid much money. Sometimes kids get hurt with the materials or tools they are using. Sometimes kids work for so long they fall asleep.

I still wasn't satisfied. I challenged them to distinguish between that and when they work. They added to their definition:

Sometimes we work but we don't say it's child labor because we are not forced, we don't get beaten, we're paid pretty good wages, we don't work for long hours, we can go to school even though we work, our parents also work and we are helping our family.

While I wasn't completely satisfied with how the students defined child labor, I realized by the end of the conversation that their grasp of

problems with children working and sweatshops in general was pretty good. (See "Rethinking Child Labor," p. 194.)

AVENUES FOR ACTION

A big dilemma for any teacher who encourages students to examine injustice is that it can tend to engender hopelessness and cynicism. If we are not careful, we can easily paint such a bleak picture of the world's problems that all appears hopeless. I have encountered that more than once in my classroom.

"What can we do?" is a common question students ask soon into our study. "We can't do anything!" is almost as common a retort.

I acknowledge the sense of frustration, but I then throw the question back to students: "What do you think we can do?"

Responses vary. Many suggest writing letters to the president. Others suggest boycotting certain companies or holding a generic "protest." Still others suggest writing to the newspaper. By far the most typical response is to suggest that we all give money or hold a food or clothing drive. (Having worked at schools with high rates of poverty, it never ceases to amaze me how generous even the poorest children can be.) Our student council of third through fifth graders sponsors a UNICEF fund drive during Halloween. It's a start and students are generally enthusiastic.

I try to add a critical concern to this type of fundraising. On the one hand, I think the work of

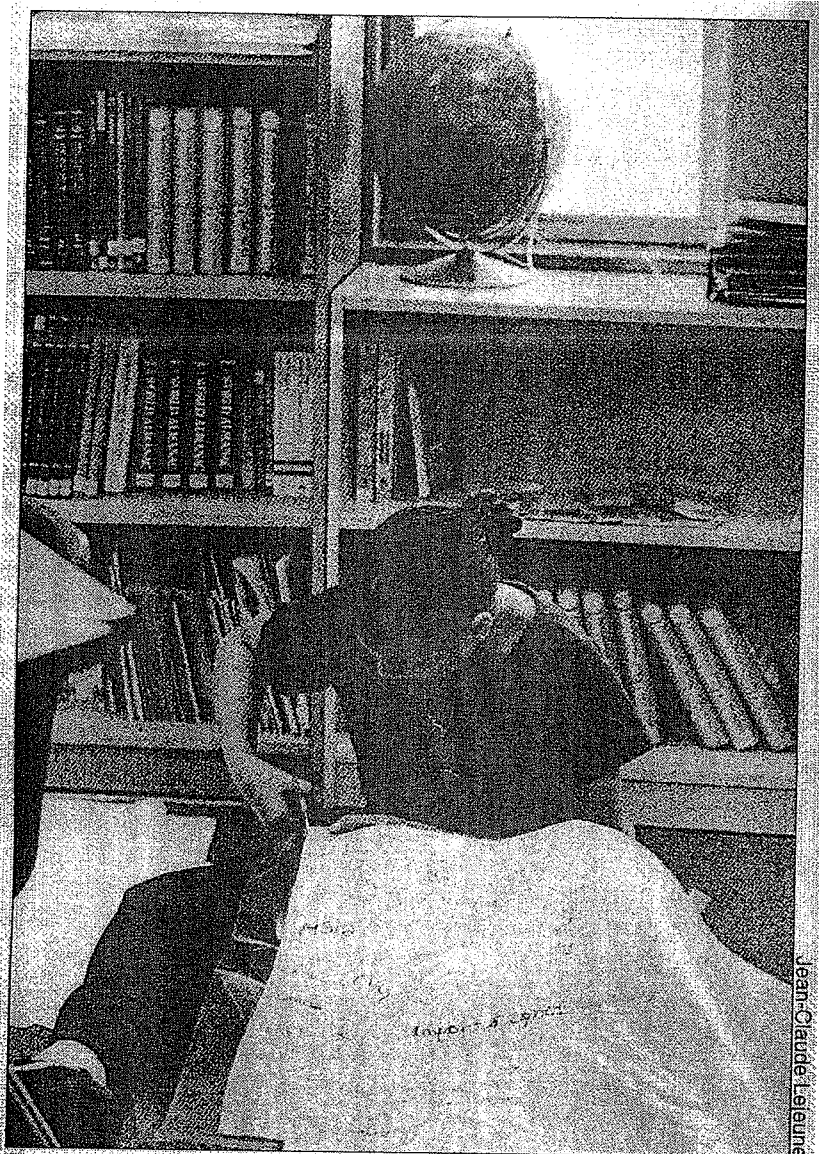
"The third world war has already started. It is a silent war. Not, for that reason, any less sinister. This war is tearing down Brazil, Latin America, and practically all the Third World. Instead of soldiers dying, there are children. It is a war over the Third World debt, one which has as its main weapon, interest, a weapon more deadly than the atom bomb, more shattering than a laser beam."

**—Luis Inacio Lula da Silva
Head of Brazil's Workers' Party**

UNICEF is helpful. On the other hand, I encourage students to recognize the scope of the problem, and the limitations of doing only this kind of people-to-people aid. The total amount raised throughout the country by UNICEF in one year, for example, (\$90 million) is minuscule compared to the task at hand. Perhaps more importantly, the fundraising strategy suggests to students that additional money would solve problems which arise more from deep inequalities of power than they do from a simple absence of funds.

Still, it can be an enlightening exercise to compare various budgets. For example, the U.S. spends about \$300 billion on its military budget, while the 1999 U.N. Human Development Report estimates that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all, and clean water and safe sewers for all is roughly \$40 billion a year. But, as mentioned, underlying these numbers is the issue of power relations, something that UNICEF strategy doesn't deal with. These deeper global issues — such as the fact that rich nations and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund force poor countries to cut back social programs and promote export crop/free trade zone strategies — need to be addressed as well, even in a fifth-grade classroom.

Interestingly, during some of the discussions of what can be done about these problems, some children are fearful. "If we work against child labor we might get killed like Iqbal Masih," a student recently said. I explain that Iqbal was in a situation much different than we are: He was a child worker organizing other child workers in Pakistan and had become a significant threat to the carpet factory owners (see p. 206). This understanding shows that students can grasp the seriousness of the struggle. One of my stu-



A student puts the finishing touches on a social studies project.

dents was so moved by the story of Iqbal Masih that she wrote: "Iqbal Masih risks his life.... I would do the same thing because I want freedom and if it's my life then I would give my life for the world."

I like to use the example of Craig Kielburger from Canada. (See p. 325) At age 12 he was so moved by a newspaper article about Iqbal Masih's death that he took direct action. First he did research to find out what was really going on — which eventually led him to Pakistan to personally investigate child labor. He confronted the Canadian Prime Minister, who happened to be visiting Pakistan at the same time. Later Craig and his friends set up an organization called Free The Children (www.freethechildren.org). Upon hearing this story, my students quickly

point out that their parents couldn't afford a trip to Pakistan. But I ask: "How else might we act in solidarity with people around the world in ways that might not require so many resources?"

Children suggest writing letters; buying things made in places that don't use sweatshops; educating young children about the issue through our writings, petitions, and poetry; and setting up their own organizations.

One year students were so interested in pursuing these issues that they asked to set up what became the "No Child Labor Club," which ultimately included third, fourth, and fifth graders. The club did additional research, made posters, circulated a petition, and eventually participated in a local march sponsored by labor organizations against NAFTA and sweatshops. A couple of my students spoke at the rally, which started at our school and marched to a nearby factory that had moved its operations to Mexico. Even though my students focused almost exclusively on the issue of child labor, they were among the most warmly received speakers.

Keshia Hernandez, a fifth-grade student at the time, told the crowd of about 150 people that she hated child labor. "I will spread my feelings

around the world," she promised. "Kids should stand up and be courageous like Joan of Arc." She described what was bad with child labor and concluded: "Iqbal Masih was one of the millions of kids that was in child labor, but he was strong and brave. He fought for justice for kids to get out of bondage. But the rug merchants in Pakistan found Iqbal and killed him. Let's remember Iqbal Masih and stop child labor."

Keshia had heard the story about my experience in Egypt with the empty soda cans. How much of it she remembered, I don't know. We can never answer the existential question of why some children are born to lives of privation while others are born to comfort. However, elementary students can and should begin to wrestle with questions like "What causes such inequality and unfairness in the world?" and "What can we do to make it a more just place?" Through such questioning, I hope the seeds of solidarity will take hold and begin to flourish. ■

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"Charity consoles but does not question.

'When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint,' said Brazilian bishop Helder Camara. 'And when I ask why they have no food, they call me a communist.'

Unlike solidarity, which is horizontal and takes place between equals, charity is top-down, humiliating those who receive it and never challenging the implicit power relations. In the best of cases, there will be justice someday, high in heaven.

Here on earth, charity doesn't worry injustice, it just tries to hide it."

—Eduardo Galeano.

Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000, pp. 311-312.