

What is War?

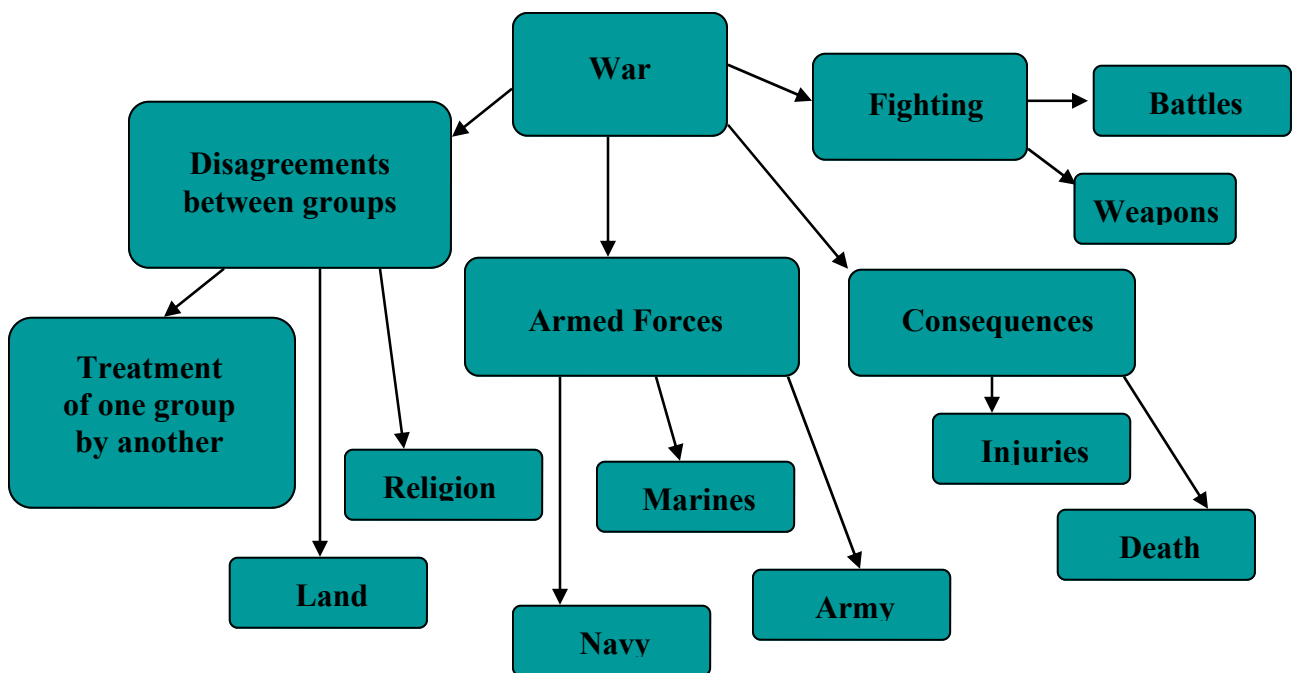
Goal: Students will create their own definitions of war after examining the ideas and opinions of others regarding this subject.

Objectives:

1. Students will read descriptions and definitions of war in a variety of literary genres.
2. Students will offer one or more suggestions or words or concepts to add to a word web mapping the definition of war.
3. Students will express their ideas orally and in writing.

Procedure:

- 1) Read *The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss aloud with the class. In this book, two communities – the Zooks and the Yooks – have long been battling each other over the proper method of buttering their bread. The communities are separated by a wall and each tries to devise a weapon of mass destruction to defeat the other.
- 2) On the chalk board or on an overhead projector, create a word web mapping students' associations with the word "war." Here is a sample of such a web:



- 3) Using an illustration from *The Butter Battle Book*, the students will complete a whole language interview activity. Find an illustration representing the leadership of each community. Have the children write interview questions and devise answers from the perspective of each community's leader. The questions should focus on the community's motivations for going to war, their objectives, any fears they may have, and whether or not they considered any alternatives. Children should write down their questions and answers. You may provide younger children with sample questions for the interview. Coach them to pretend that they are the leader of the Zooks or the leader of the Yooks. Children may pair up with a partner so that each can take on one role and interview the other.

Some Sample Questions:

1. How do you (the Zooks or Yooks) think bread should be buttered?
 2. What is wrong with the way the other group (the Yooks or Zooks) butters their bread?
 3. Why does this difference of opinion make you want to fight?
 4. How will you fight the other group?
 5. What do you hope to gain by fighting?
 6. Do you think there might be any other ways to solve the problem besides fighting? What might you do instead?
- 4) Read “What is War?” aloud with your students. Eleven year-old Jeremy J.S. Bigger of Canada composed this poem to honor all veterans. He wrote:

What is War?
Is it good?
Is it bad?
Does it prove anything?
What do you think war is?

A little boy might say
It would be cool,
With guns, tanks, planes
And grenades.

A mother might say
It's a lonely time
As she would wait anxiously at the window
For him to come home,
And hopefully not a messenger.

An old soldier
With shiny medals on his coat might say nothing
He would stare off into space.
Probably thinking of his friends who died in the war.

What do you think war is?

- 5) Encourage students to think about war from the perspectives of the boy, mother, and soldier that appear in the poem. Have each student compose three Haiku poems – one from the perspective of the boy, one from the perspective of the mother, and one from the perspective of the soldier. Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry with three unrhymed lines following these syllable counts:
1st line: 5 syllables 2nd line: 7 syllables 3rd line: 5 syllables

- 6) Students should compose a fourth Haiku poem verbalizing their own perspective about war. Collect the poems and assess according to a standard set of rubrics. Compile the students' Haikus of their own perspectives and post on a bulletin board or create a classroom book.
- 7) Other people view war and the call to arms in a more positive light:

The army of the United States is a shield of democracy. It's a people's army, a citizen's army; its glories are the people's glories, its sorrows the people's sorrows. It is your army and mine. [Today's army is made up of] the valor of men, the spirit of loyalty, common effort for the common good. We call our "Tommy," "doughboy," "red legs," "yellow legs," or just plain soldier (what a [feeling] of honor is in that word – soldier!), but no matter what the [name] he is defender of democracy, keeper of the faith.

– Hanson W. Baldwin, 1940

The terms "Tommy," "doughboy," "red legs," and "yellow legs" are nicknames for soldiers.

When Hanson W. Baldwin wrote these words in 1940, World War II was already raging in Europe and America would become involved shortly. As a class, talk about how Baldwin's feelings about the call to arms seem to differ from those of others they have read. Based upon Baldwin's description of the army, have your students predict how Baldwin would describe or define war. Baldwin's words seem to glorify the Army and their cause. Do students agree with Baldwin's characterizations? Probe these issues in a think-aloud discussion.

- 8) As a culminating point to the lesson, have students write a journal response in which they offer their own description of war and explore their feelings about war.