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First printing of Living Books edition April 2002.

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Designed by Jackie Noe

Adapted from *The War Is Over but Children Still Have Questions* © 1991 by David Stoop and Stephen Arterburn.

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ISBN 0-8423-7063-3, mass paper

Printed in the United States of America

06 05 04 03 02
6 5 4 3 2 1

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Questions about War

1

What is war?

When two or more people are angry and hurt each other, it is called a fight. When two countries, or even more than two countries, are angry and try to hurt each other, it is called war. War is fought when countries disagree and can't work out their problems by talking together.

Often, wars are fought because one country wants some or all of the land that another country has. If it wants the land badly enough, it will fight to try to win it. Sometimes when other countries see this happening, they might get into the war to protect the country that wants to keep its land.

Think about a war like you think about your friends and enemies. If a big bully tried to take away your friend's dog, you might decide to help your friend save his dog. You would team up with your friend against the big bully.

This is how countries, large and small, come together to protect each other. It is called "forming an alliance." When groups of countries, or alliances, fight, it is sometimes called a world war. So many countries are angry with each other that it seems like the whole world is fighting.

War is never a very good thing because some people get hurt, some people are killed, and it all costs a lot of money. But sometimes wars have to be fought

because we want to protect ourselves, and we want to protect others from the bullies who sometimes are in charge of countries.

An example of this is the war that was fought in the Persian Gulf in 1991. Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, also wanted to be president of the land of Kuwait. He liked that land because a lot of the country is next to the sea, which makes it easy to ship oil to other countries. One day he sent his army into Kuwait and took over the whole country. He killed many people and said that Kuwait was now a part of Iraq. The United States is friends with Kuwait, and we formed an alliance with other countries like England, France, and Saudi Arabia to get Saddam Hussein's army out of Kuwait. This was so we could give the country back to the people of Kuwait, who were in charge of it before the war.

We did not want to go to war with Iraq. We had nothing against the people there. But we could not allow Saddam Hussein to be mean to all the people in Kuwait. We talked to him and gave him many chances to send his army back home. We told him it was wrong to take over another country and hurt its people. When he refused to listen to us, we met again with the other countries in our alliance. Together we decided if Saddam Hussein did not leave Kuwait, we would try to force him out. This is not always the best way, but it was the only way the alliance felt it could get Iraq's army out of Kuwait. So when Saddam Hussein still refused to leave Kuwait, we started to drop bombs on his army in Kuwait and also on his army and weapons in Iraq. We were not trying to bomb the people of Iraq, just the army. After a lot of bombing, we finally forced Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. The bombing wasn't something we wanted to do, but we did it to help our friends. We also fought the war because we wanted

to teach other countries the lesson that you cannot take over another country just because you feel like it. It is not fair.

Sometimes wars do not occur between two countries. They take place between groups of people inside a country that have different sets of beliefs or ideas. In the United States, we had a war called the Civil War. Some thought that people should have slaves, and some thought they should not. Those who wanted slaves wanted to form a new country where it would be okay to own slaves. A war had to be fought to keep the country together. Otherwise the United States would now be two countries instead of just one. Other countries have these kinds of civil wars for other reasons. If some people do not like their leader, and if he will not give up his position, they fight a war to remove him as the leader.

War is a tragic thing in our world. It is always better to talk things over than fight things out. But as long as the world has existed, there have been wars, and there will always be wars. We need to work together to bring peace to the world and prevent as many wars as possible.

2

Do innocent people die in a war?

In any war innocent people are often hurt and killed. Even in the worst country with the meanest army there will be innocent soldiers who do not want to fight. Sometimes these soldiers fight just so their own leaders won't kill them. They get killed fighting for something they don't even believe in. Many Americans who died in the Vietnam War did not think it was right for us to be fighting in Vietnam. They fought anyway, not because they were afraid of our leaders, but because they loved America. Many of

these innocent soldiers died. Often the most innocent people who die are the willing and dedicated soldiers in the war.

Sometimes people are killed who are not fighting the war. It is rarely done on purpose, but it does happen. Sometimes the computers that guide the bombs make a mistake. Instead of hitting a building with weapons or supplies in it, the bomb hits a house or a neighborhood. Our country does everything it can to prevent killing women, children, and anyone who is not actually fighting.

There are mean people who do kill innocent people on purpose. If they are caught when the war is over, they are punished for doing this. Killing innocent people is called a war crime. If someone is found guilty of doing it, that person might be put to death.

3

Do we bomb people's houses?

No, not on purpose.

When we bomb another country, we are aiming at targets that are part of the other country's army, air force, or navy. A military target is a building that has something in it that helps the enemy fight the war. It might be a big airplane hangar with fighter jets or bombers in it. It could have radar equipment that tries to track our planes as they fly. These are the types of targets that we try to bomb in a war.

But sometimes a bomb will drop from one of our planes and hit other buildings by mistake. In every recent war, some bombs have been dropped on houses. This is called civilian bombing. It is a terrible tragedy of war. Any time we find out we have bombed someone's house, we change the direction we are firing missiles or dropping bombs.

4

What is friendly fire?

When a soldier sees or hears bombs explode on the battlefield, he knows it is either enemy fire or friendly fire. "Enemy fire" means bombs that come from the enemy. "Friendly fire" means bombs that come from the soldier's own army.

The term "friendly fire" is often used when our own soldiers are injured or killed from our own bullets or bombs. If we try to bomb or shoot at an enemy and end up hitting our own people, we say it was a casualty resulting from friendly fire. This happens when soldiers do not talk to each other enough to know where their own army is and where the enemy is. It also happens when computers make mistakes and miscalculate where bombs should be dropped. Instead of bombs dropping on the enemy troops, they fall on our own friendly troops. From time to time friendly fire happens when one of our soldiers accidentally gets in the way of another of our soldiers and is hit by a bullet.

There is nothing friendly about friendly fire. The term just means that a friend, not an enemy, has pulled the trigger accidentally.

In the Persian Gulf War there were seven soldiers who were killed in one friendly fire accident. A rocket hit the truck they were riding in. The rocket came from someone on our side.

5

How much does war cost, and who pays for it?

War costs a lot of money. How much it costs depends on how many soldiers are sent to fight and how many bullets are shot and how many bombs are dropped. Some say the Persian Gulf War cost a half billion

dollars a day. Some of the missiles we launched in that war cost a million dollars. Some of the airplanes that were shot down cost more than \$100 million. Also, just providing enough food for all the soldiers is a huge expense.

Everyone in the country pays taxes to help pay for a war. Certain amounts of money are taken from the taxes collected and are used to defend the country. Some of the money your mother or father earns from their work goes into taxes and is spent on the war. Some of the money will go to train soldiers so they will know how to fight. Other money will be spent on equipment like guns and rockets so our soldiers will be able to fight when war comes.

In addition to our own money, we sometimes get money from other countries to help us, especially when we defend their country. Other countries may give money to pay us to fight because they don't have soldiers of their own. In the Persian Gulf War, Kuwait gave the United States billions of dollars because we defended their country. Other countries like Japan also gave us money to fight the war.

6

How many people die in a war?

Sometimes thousands die and sometimes hundreds of thousands. It depends on how long the war lasts and how many bombs fall and how many bullets are shot on each side.

Even if only one person dies in war, it's one person too many. Sometimes a war is necessary, but even then it's a terrible thing when someone dies in that war. If someone you know or someone in the family dies, you come to understand how even one person dying is too many.

The following list will give you an idea of how many American people have died in the past wars:

Civil War.	620,000
World War I	117,000
World War II.	400,000
Korean War	54,000
Vietnam War	58,000

7

How does war start?

There are many ways that a war can start.

When a country decides to take over another country, it might surprise attack that country and start bombing or roll its tanks over the ground toward the soldiers. When the United States was in a war with Japan, it was a surprise attack by Japan that started the war. The Japanese air force flew to Hawaii and dropped bombs on many of our ships in a place called Pearl Harbor. Just after the bombs dropped, Franklin Roosevelt, the president of the United States back then, declared war on Japan. That declaration was the official start of the war.

When there is an argument between two countries, often one country will set a deadline. A leader might say, "If the other country does not pull all of its soldiers out by noon tomorrow, we will begin fighting." If noon comes and the soldiers are still where they aren't supposed to be, the war starts.

8

What if you don't want to fight?

Not everyone involved in a war actually does the fighting. Some people work on things like radios in buildings far away from the fighting. Others take care

of the wounded and serve as doctors, nurses, and medical assistants. All of these people are called support staff. Although they don't actually fight, they provide support for those who do fight.

A person who wants to serve the country but does not believe in war is called a conscientious objector. Anyone can declare they are a conscientious objector and not have to fight. They serve the country in what is called a non-combat role.

9

What makes something bomb-proof?

Something that is bomb-proof will not be destroyed if a bomb is dropped on it. Most buildings that are above ground could be destroyed by a bomb and are not bomb-proof.

Bomb-proof places are usually deep in the ground, like a cellar, only much deeper. Many of the bomb-proof places are called bunkers. They are protected by thick layers of concrete and metal. In a normal house, a wall might be as thick as your arm. In a bomb-proof shelter, a wall might be as thick as a whole house. It costs a lot of money to make something bomb-proof.

In our country, some of our military command centers are deep within mountains in order to make them bomb-proof. We do this so that the leaders in a war can stay alive in order to lead our country and our troops.

10

Is hurting people ever okay?

Some people say that hurting people is never okay. These people are called pacifists, and they believe that hurting someone is never right. This belief is often

part of their religion, so it's what their church believes.

Many people, though, believe that sometimes we must hurt a person to stop him from hurting other people. They don't want to do this, but they think it's the only way to keep others from being hurt.

There are people who like to hurt others. These bullies pick on people they think they can beat up. If a bully decided to hurt you, you would probably want someone else—maybe one of your friends—to stop the bully.

When big countries try to bully little countries, they hurt the little countries. Sometimes we have to hurt those who are in charge of the big bully countries just so they will leave other countries alone.

Hurting others is not a good thing, but sometimes it seems like the only way to get someone to pay attention and stop the bad things they are doing. If you have ever had your hand slapped so you would not burn it on a stove or fire, you know what I mean when I say that sometimes it is okay to hurt people. Sometimes you have to hurt them for their own good, and sometimes you have to hurt them for the good of others.

11

Will there be a draft?

The draft happens when we do not have enough soldiers to fight a war. Today all of our soldiers have volunteered to fight. They were not drafted like many of the soldiers who fought in other wars such as Vietnam.

Sometimes children worry about the draft because they are afraid Mom or Dad may be drafted and asked to go fight. When a draft happens, young people are drafted first. People between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four usually are drafted long before older people.

As of today we have plenty of volunteer soldiers to protect our country. We had plenty of soldiers to fight the Persian Gulf War. There is little chance of a draft being started anytime soon.

12

Why do we let women fight?

There are many women who join our military who want to fight the enemy in whatever way they can. Some are pilots of planes, and some fly helicopters. Others work computers and other machines needed to keep track of the enemy. For years our government did not want women to have an active role in the military. In the past women had to be nurses to help our country in wartime. Today people have changed their minds about what women should and shouldn't do in war. Women have earned respect and the right to protect this country just as men do. In fact, some women have very dangerous jobs in the military. We should be very thankful we have so many dedicated women who are willing to protect this country.

13

How can we tell who is winning a war?

It is hard to tell who is winning a war. Part of the military might be doing very well while another part is having a hard time. Sometimes reporters think they have heard what has happened and later they find out the facts were different. The enemy often distorts what is going on to confuse us. Sometimes an enemy will lie to make his own soldiers think things are going better than they really are. War can be confusing.

Most people agree that the side in the war that is losing the most people and machines is the side that is losing. Another sign of losing is if the soldiers on

one side are forced to turn around and go back in the direction they came from. If they have to retreat, back up, and lose ground, it is most likely they are losing.

Winning a war means that the enemy finally gives up or runs away. Everything in war is done to make one side finally give up and quit fighting. This is usually followed by both sides signing an agreement not to fight. This is called a treaty. The side who wins the war is allowed to write what the treaty will say.

14

What happens if we don't win a war?

The result of not winning is different with every war. In the Persian Gulf War, if we had not won, we would have had to allow Iraq to run Kuwait. We would have left the area feeling very sad because our soldiers would have died even though nothing good would have come from their being brave enough to die.

In the Persian Gulf War, losing would not have changed anything in the United States. Since we were fighting for another country, our own country would not have been hurt. We would have been sad and other countries might have been mad at us, but we would have been safe.

When we were at war with Japan in World War II, we could have lost our country if we had not won. That would have meant that other people would be running the country in Washington, D.C. In the Vietnam War, our country was not in danger.

15

What is it like to be a soldier?

Being a soldier is a tough job. Soldiers are hard workers who are brave enough to fight the enemy. If a soldier is in the army, he might sleep in a tent on the

ground. He might have to dig a big hole and sleep in it. A soldier in the navy is called a sailor and sleeps in a bunk bed on a ship.

The soldiers on the ground sometimes go for days without a shower. They go to the bathroom outside, not in a clean restroom with tile and mirrors. Their food comes out of cans and is sometimes dehydrated. Dehydrated food has all the water taken out so it is lighter to carry and will not become rotten. Soldiers have to add water to dehydrated food before they can eat it.

Sometimes there are surprises for soldiers. In the Persian Gulf War, the cooks filled trucks with hamburgers they had made, and they drove to the soldiers on the battlefield to feed them hot hamburgers.

Soldiers spend many hours training to fight. When war happens, they may spend days waiting before the fighting starts. Once it does, it can be scary. Deadly bombs and bullets come close to where the soldiers are. Soldiers must be smart and alert to stay alive. But even the smartest ones sometimes are hurt or killed because the enemy knows what kind of weapons to use and the right time to use them. It is important to remember that although it is a dangerous job, most people who go to fight do not get hurt. Most return home safely.

Most soldiers have one feeling in common. They want the war they are fighting to be over so they can come home. They miss their family and friends. They want to be back home. They hope and pray war will end quickly.

16

How do mines explode?

Mines are bombs buried in the ground or floating in the water. They go off in different ways. Most have a

trigger or several triggers that go off when something touches them. If a soldier steps on a mine, the trigger goes off and the mine explodes. If a car or truck drives over a mine in the road, it will set off the trigger and blow up the mine. If a boat comes up against a mine floating in the water, the side of the boat will hit the trigger and cause an explosion.

Some mines are even trickier than those. They work on electronic signals. If a person or a truck goes by a sensor, it blows up the mine up ahead. Fortunately, we have a lot of machines that blow up the mines before anyone is hurt by them. We drop bombs and use road graders and other things that prevent our soldiers from being blown up on the land. In the ocean we use special boats called mine sweepers that help clear the water so a boat can go through safely.

17

What are chemical bombs?

Chemical bombs are bombs that contain poisonous gas. When the bomb blows up, the gas escapes into the air. Anyone who breathes the gas gets sick because it is poison. There aren't very many of these chemical bombs because the big countries in the world have agreed not to make them. But some leaders of other countries have these bombs, so our soldiers have to be extra careful.

We have made special suits for our soldiers that allow them to breathe when chemical bombs explode. These suits prevent many soldiers from being killed and hurt. Soldiers also carry medicine to make the poison go away if they breathe any of it in. Maybe one day all the nations will have given up using these terrible bombs that can hurt so many people.

18

How do bombs know where to go?

Many of our bombs are dropped out of the bottom of an airplane and fall to the ground. They do not know exactly where to go; they just explode wherever they happen to land.

Some modern bombs have computers inside them that guide them to the target. These are sometimes called "smart bombs." Some of these have a special computer map inside. When the bomb launcher makes a dot on that map with the computer, the bomb knows to find that place on the earth. Other bombs have a special device that searches for hot spots. Since tanks and airplanes have very hot engines, when the bomb is launched, it goes after the hot engines of those tanks and planes and blows them up.

19

How are prisoners treated?

A few years ago several countries got together in Europe and had a big meeting. Since the meeting was held in the city of Geneva, Switzerland, this big meeting was called the Geneva convention.

The countries came together in this place to develop rules about war. They decided if we had to have wars, we should agree ahead of time about what is fair and what is not fair when fighting a war. The Geneva convention created a number of war rules. Today during a war, anyone who does something against these rules can be punished when the war is over. These people are called war criminals because they did not follow accepted rules of war.

One of the rules is that prisoners must be treated with respect. They should not be tortured, and they

should be given food and a decent place to sleep. The bad thing is that some countries do not follow these rules. Although most prisoners are treated well, many are hurt by the enemy. Some are tortured cruelly. Fortunately all the leaders know the rules and most leaders follow them, so usually our prisoners are not hurt.

20

How do soldiers killing each other in a war solve the world's problems?

Soldiers killing each other is a terrible way to have problems solved. The soldiers fight for the country so that everyone else in the country does not have to fight.

It is like a school that has a soccer team. If that team plays another soccer team and wins, it is like the whole school won. Really the school did not win the game—only the kids playing on the field won the game. But because they represent the whole school, their win stands for the win of the whole school.

That is how it works with soldiers and armies. We do not want little children or old people to have to fight in a war. We also only want those who have been trained to fight to be out there fighting. So instead of untrained people going to war, only the soldiers go. If they win, it is a win for the entire country.

21

What do soldiers wear?

Soldiers wear special uniforms designed to help them fight the war. The soldiers on the ground wear heavy boots that keep their feet warm and prevent them from being crushed. Their pants are of heavy

material. They have pockets that hold what they need for fighting. There are special loops and hooks to latch things on to. Most soldiers wear a special belt that holds guns, water, bullets, and other items. Their helmets are made of hard material that protects their heads in case a piece of metal from a bomb hits them.

When soldiers fight in the cold, they wear heavy jackets; when they fight in the heat, they wear cooler clothes. Everything they wear is designed especially for the work they do. It helps and protects them.

22

Where do they bury soldiers when they die?

Many soldiers are buried in national cemeteries that are reserved only for war heroes. In Washington, D.C., Arlington National Cemetery is full of white crosses on the graves of our brave soldiers.

Sometimes soldiers write down where they wish to be buried before they go to fight. All soldiers know that death is a possibility, so they often make those kinds of arrangements just in case they do not come back alive.