



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2002 Volume III: War and Peace in the Twentieth Century

Just War Theory and the Wars of the 20th Century

Guide for Curriculum Unit 02.03.01
by John Buell

"For as long as men and women have talked about war, they have talked about it in terms of right and wrong." This quote from Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* is an excellent starting point for a high school unit on the ethical considerations of war. The objective of the unit is to keep that conversation going by creating a framework which students can apply to specific wars and specific events within wars thus enabling them to make reasoned moral judgments. One of the central tenets of Walzer's book is that despite the vast range of human culture and diversity (often well represented in the urban American classroom) human beings share a remarkable commonality on basic moral questions. By establishing basic criteria securely founded upon the values we all share it is possible to entertain questions and take defensible positions on issues of war and peace on a deeper critical level than found in most high school history text books. High school students are particularly interested in moral questions and any intellectual exercise that calls upon them to apply their own judgment in this area is usually met with enthusiasm.

(Recommended for U.S. History, grades 10-11, and World History, grade 9.)

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