

INTRODUCTION

Questions From A Worker Who Reads

BY BERTOLT BRECHT

Who built the seven towers of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed,
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song,
Were all her dwellings palaces? and even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the sea rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.
Young Alexander plundered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War. Who
Triumphed with him?
Each page a victory,
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?
So many particulars.
So many questions.

*From Selected Poems by Bertolt Brecht and H.R. Hays
(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1947).*

Page 1 image: A Honduran boy falls asleep at his workbench while making softballs. Photo courtesy of UNICEF.



Corbis

Women and children near a chemical plant in Bombay, India.

INTRODUCTION

Why We Wrote This Book

We began this book with the intention of focusing on sweatshops and child labor around the world. Like many others, we'd been outraged by stories of beatings at Nike factories in Vietnam, by images of children as young as six years old toiling over brand-name soccer balls in Pakistan, and by revelations that major clothes manufacturers pay workers pennies an hour in places like Haiti and Honduras while they charge top dollar at home.

But the more we focused on the larger "why?" questions, the harder it was to contain our teaching in simple "sweatshop" and "child labor" categories. It was impossible to separate our teaching about wretched conditions for workers around the world from all the factors that produced the desperation that forces people to seek work in those conditions. These factors include:

- The history of colonial domination of much of the world that took self-sufficient economies and horribly distorted them.
- The debt crisis, and how it has been manipulated by Western-led institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which bully poor countries with "structural adjustment programs."
- The free trade, "neo-liberal" emphasis of recent trade agreements like NAFTA, and

now the World Trade Organization, that encourage poor countries to export their way to economic health and to specialize in the "commodity" of cheap labor.

- Military interventions in places as far apart as Vietnam, Guatemala, and the Congo which have discouraged alternative routes to development.

The more we taught about issues of globalization, the more we found ourselves telling our students: "Everything is connected. You can't really understand what's going on in one part of the world without looking at how it's related to everything else."

For example, in the Huaorani Indian struggle in eastern Ecuador (depicted in the role play, "Oil, Rainforests, and Indigenous Cultures," p. 268), the debt crisis forces the government to aggressively seek sources of cash — like oil — to make interest payments to international

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banks. Transnational oil companies take advantage of widespread poverty to pay starvation wages to workers in terribly unsafe conditions. And like a bull in a china shop, they maraud through fragile rainforest ecosystems. In the quest for profits, oil companies treat people and the environment simply as resources to exploit. But not only are rainforests being ravaged, the indigenous cultures that depend on those rainforests are also in danger of being wiped out.

If oil companies successfully sucked all the oil out of the Huaorani's territory in Ecuador — perhaps as much as \$2 billion worth — it would power cars in the United States for only 13 days. Thus, the more we taught about issues in the Third World, the more it brought us home — home to an epidemic of consumption that links us to the poverty of others around the world, and links us to the growing ecological crisis that threatens the very existence of life on earth.

And casting a large shadow on the crisis in Ecuador and so many other poor countries is the legacy of U.S. military interventions — especially in this hemisphere — that have aborted alternative models of democracy and development. Globalization is not merely an economic phenomenon; it is accompanied by a big stick that

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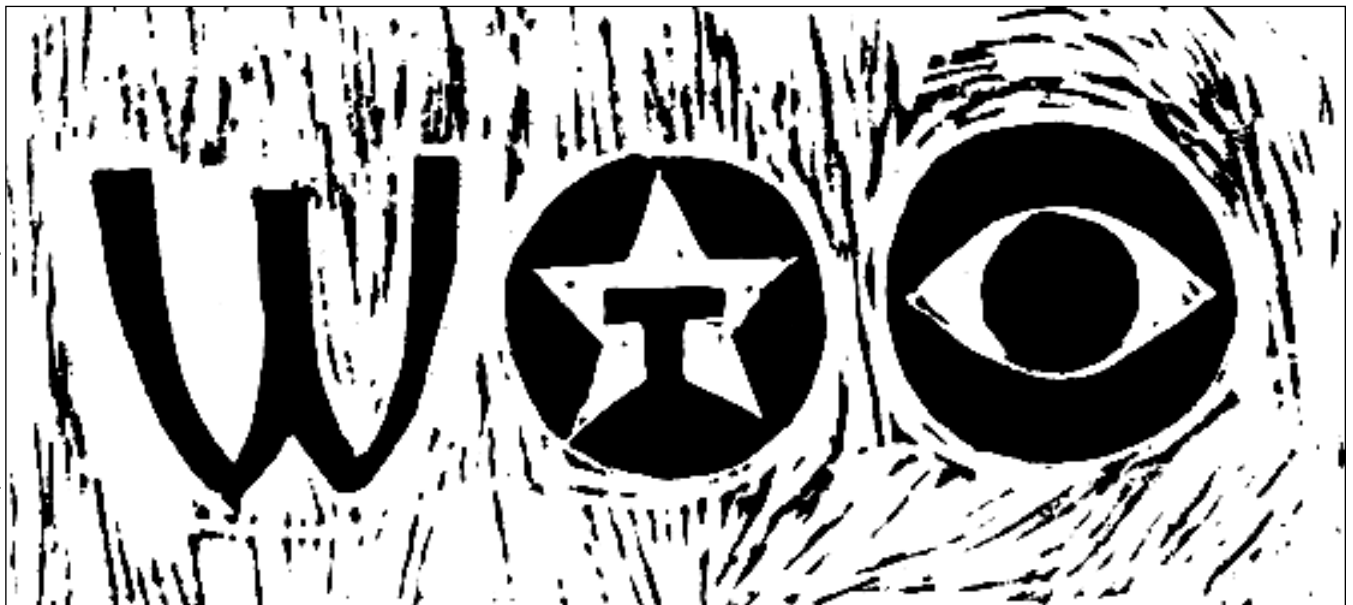
has been wielded time and again, most often by the United States, to protect wealth and privilege.

This interconnectedness of issues was brought home powerfully in late 1999 with the mass demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, summed up by the celebrated placard, "Turtles and Teamsters: Together at Last." What was so remarkable about the events in Seattle was that for the first time massive protests targeted not simply one single issue, but an entire constellation of grievances. The presence of U.S. steelworkers, Korean farmers, South African miners, French environmentalists, and Canadian teachers marching

side by side underscored this new political awareness.

As we teach and organize around these matters, it's vital that we emphasize the centrality of race. The development of European colonialism was sheathed in theories of white supremacy which sought to justify the slaughter of indigenous peoples, the theft of their lands, and the enslavement of millions of Africans. Today's system of global inequality builds from these enormous crimes and is similarly legitimated, albeit more subtly, by notions of white supremacy. Vast imbalances of wealth and power still correlate heavily with skin color. Centuries of racism have

Nicolas Lampert and Susan Simensky Bietila



normalized this inequality and have blinded too many people to its contemporary manifestations.

“THEIR” LIVES AND “OURS”

Much of today’s media coverage of globalization draws lines between “us” and “them.” “We” don’t have things like child labor and sweatshops. But of course we do. Indeed most knowledgeable observers believe that we have more sweatshops in this country than ever before — especially if we include the “sweatshops in the fields” for farm workers. So as we considered the big, interconnected picture in crafting this book, we tried to focus also on conditions at home. We especially didn’t want this to be a curriculum of

pity. We hoped that students would consider that whether one works in a “sweatshop” or not, our lives here are directly affected by the global “race to the bottom” that pits workers around the world against one another. People here do have a moral imperative to help people everywhere. But we also have a personal stake in challenging the poor conditions around the globe that exert a downward pull on conditions here.

Early in this book’s development, one teacher made this point a little differently. She advised us not to focus solely on exploitation “over there.” “It’s not just happening in the Third World,” she said. “My kids are getting cheated out of hours at McDonald’s; they’re forced to

“IS THIS BOOK BIASED?”

Historian Howard Zinn once wrote, “In a world where justice is maldistributed there is no such thing as a neutral or representative recapitulation of the facts.” We agree. Every curriculum begins from certain convictions about the world, even if they may not be conscious. Neutrality is neither possible nor desirable. Teaching — regardless of grade level or discipline — always takes place against the backdrop of certain global realities.

And as articles in this book amply document, today’s realities are grim: Vast inequalities of wealth yawn wider and wider, the earth is being consumed and polluted at a ferocious pace, and commercial values are supplanting humane ones. It seems that all aspects of life now wear “For Sale” signs and are subject to privatization. With the patenting of the genetic codes of plants and even human beings, we can be excused for feeling that we have entered a world of bizarre *Twilight Zone* reruns. As *Rethinking Schools* editors observed in an editorial for our 15th anniversary issue: “The wish-dreams of the privatizers are exemplified well in a recent MasterCard commercial that depicts an auctioneer offering his latest sale items: the letter ‘B,’ the color red, gravity. The ad delights in a future where every last aspect of life is commodified.”

In a world where the very idea of “public” is being threatened, for educators to feign neutrality is irresponsible. The pedagogical aim in this

social context needs to be truth rather than “balance” — if by balance we mean giving equal credence to claims that we know to be false and that, in any event, enjoy wide dispersal in the dominant culture. The teacher who takes pride in never revealing his or her “opinions” to students models for them moral apathy.

Nonetheless, we would never urge that teachers shelter their students from views that they find repugnant. Indeed, the way to develop critical global literacy is only through direct engagement with diverse ideas. Nor is it ever appropriate for teachers to hand students worked-out opinions without equipping students to develop their own analyses of important issues. Simply because we have not given “equal time” in this book to proponents of corporate-driven globalization does not mean that we believe that students should be denied access to pro-globalization perspectives.

We see a distinct difference between a biased curriculum and a partisan one. Teaching is biased when it ignores multiple perspectives and does not allow interrogation of its own assumptions and propositions. Partisan teaching, on the other hand, invites diversity of opinion but does not lose sight of the aim of the curriculum: to alert students to global injustice, to seek explanations, and to encourage activism. This is the kind of teaching we hope *Rethinking Globalization* will encourage.

— The editors

RETHINKING OUR LANGUAGE

Words are metaphorical, and may generate misleading images. When we say that the United States is a “developed” nation, the word paints pictures of a social or economic process that is somehow complete; it suggests a society that has fulfilled its *natural* destiny, that is as it was meant to be. Likewise, the use of terms like “developing” or “underdeveloped” to describe a country or culture, implies only a deficit status. It defines other peoples by what they are not, and establishes a Western-type industrial society as the model toward which all societies are heading — or at least ought to be heading.

The “developing” or “underdeveloped” tags miss the ways in which other countries, other cultures, are already developed. So-called developing nations have thousands of years of traditional knowledge stored in their cultural patterns. For example, in another Rethinking Schools book, *Rethinking Columbus*, Philip Tajitsu Nash and Emilienne Ireland describe a typical elder of the Wauja people of the Amazon rainforest, who

has memorized hundreds of sacred songs and stories; plays several musical instruments; and knows the habits and habitats of hundreds of forest animals, birds, and insects, as well as the medicinal uses of local plants. He can guide his sons in building a two-story tall house using only axes, machetes, and materials from the forest. He is an expert agronomist. He speaks several languages fluently; knows precisely how he is related to several hundred of his closest kin; and has acquired sufficient wisdom to share his home peacefully with in-laws, cousins, children, and grandchildren. Female elders are comparably learned and accomplished.

The integrity of traditional cultures may be missed when we define development as increases in gross national product. Listen, for example, to the arrogance in the comments of the head of Nike corporate education when he told a reporter, “I think we’re doing a great job quite frankly, to help evolve some of these cultures.” He said that Vietnam’s culture was “just emerging,” thanks in part to Nike investment. He made these claims

about a culture that was well-established centuries before the United States existed. Even to call other countries “poor,” which we do in this book from time to time, hides the ways they may be rich in traditional knowledge and relationships.

More often in this book we use the term Third World to characterize the countries not part of the industrialized First World (the United States, Europe, etc.) or the industrialized Second World (the former Soviet bloc countries). It’s an older term, one that gained wide usage after the 1955 conference of Afro-Asian countries in Bandung, Indonesia, and is still favored by many advocates for global justice — for example, the Third World Network (www.twinside.org.sg) — along with the newer expression Global South. Both terms acknowledge broad commonalities among countries, but don’t carry the connotation that those countries are being held to the standard of thing-rich industrial societies, as is true with “developing” or “underdeveloped” labels.

The term we include in this book’s title may itself be misleading. “Globalization” can imply that we are all mutually influencing one another, growing together, becoming a “global village,” in the words of that unfortunate cliché. It can miss the profound imbalances in who determines and benefits from a “globalized” world. And it’s a grand-sounding title that suggests that we’ve entered a new epoch of human history. More accurately, we’re witnessing the quickening spread of the profit system as more and more areas of the globe are drawn into its orbit. Life throughout the world is becoming increasingly commodified. The scope of this development may be new, but the process is not. Thus when we use the term “globalization” in the book, we are referring to this profit-driven process, rather than to the potential of global networking for a better world, although some use expressions like “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below” to imagine a more humane and ecologically sane connectedness.

The point is simply that language is political and metaphorical. Every time we speak to our students, our language offers them images that may communicate more than we intend. Thus part of “rethinking globalization” is rethinking the language we use to talk about the world.

— *The editors*

work late, and managers disrespect them." Despite important differences, the same essential market forces at play in Mexico or Indonesia influence life here as well — and often in much grimmer ways than are to be found, say, at McDonald's. Globalization has so disrupted communities around the world that people's desperation has left them easy targets for countless abuses. The traffic in women and children as virtual sex slaves is one of the more tragic examples. Immigrants around the world, including in the United States, labor in some of the worst conditions imaginable; and people die every day attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexican border.

One of our students recently took to heart our constant "everything is connected" refrain: "If everything is connected," she said, "then you can't change anything without changing everything. But you can't change everything, so that means that you can't change anything."

Hers was a profound but troubling observation. In our teaching and in this book, we want to indicate that people's efforts to fight for decent lives make an enormous difference. Throughout the book we highlight historical and contemporary struggles to address the diverse but interconnected problems detailed here. The world is a better place for these efforts, and they are vital sources of hope for the future.

But our student's insight also needs to be considered. She's wrong that we can't change anything. But she's right that we have to change everything, if by "everything" we mean the interlocking ideas and practices that make private interests paramount, and undermine the common good. This book is an argument for the necessity of holding in our minds and in our classrooms the big global picture. The world is a web of relationships. To be truly effective, every effort to make a difference needs to be grounded in that broader analysis. Likewise, every effort to teach about the world also needs to be informed by the bigger picture.

When we put "globalization" in the title of this book, we realized that we were promising readers, literally, the world. We did our best. But there are enormous areas that we may have touched upon but did not adequately cover here: the global AIDS crisis and public health issues, in general; many of the ways that globalization particularly impacts women and children; the vast and ongoing global migrations; the war against drugs and the military intervention in Colombia; the threat posed by global

warming; the privatization of water; global housing shortages; issues of reparations for the slave trade and colonialism. Nor did we address as fully as we would have liked movements for global justice and questions about the social and economic systems needed to address the ills that profit-driven globalization creates.

As we neared publication, the world was stunned by the horrific events of September 11, 2001. On one level, these events brought into focus other limitations of this volume. We don't directly address the issues of religious fundamentalism or terrorism. Nor do we feature articles that examine how globalization is playing out in the Muslim world — and how this might be related to the development of violent networks like al-Qaeda.

However, the events of September 11th are the clearest argument imaginable for the the kind of inquiry that we propose in this book: A deep



Associated Press/Beth A. Keiser

Protesters in sea turtle costumes at the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

R*ethinking Globalization* includes background readings, lesson plans, teaching articles, role plays and simulations, student handouts, interviews, poems, cartoons, annotated resource lists, and teaching ideas. It is curricular without being a curriculum, in that it is not designed as a day-by-day guide to teaching about globalization.

The book opens with several articles that introduce some of the broad themes that weave throughout the book. We then offer background on the colonial roots of global wealth and power inequalities, although we don't necessarily recommend a chronological approach to teaching about globalization. Sometimes it works best to pick a dramatic issue like child labor, global sweatshops, or the clash between "development" and indigenous cultures, and then later pull back to examine historical roots to current problems.

Some articles and activities are aimed at upper elementary students; others are aimed at students who are high school-aged and older. Many of the readings and activities included here work well in teacher inser-

vice, college-level courses and other adult education contexts. We did not segregate the book into sections for different grade levels. This is because many, if not most, of the activities and readings aimed at elementary students could be adapted for use with high school-aged and older students, and vice versa.

Readings that we've designed to accompany a specific teaching activity — and which are intended to be duplicated — are labeled "Handout," but many other readings could also be copied and used with students.

Each chapter begins with an introduction to outline the issues covered in that section, and ends with a description of further teaching ideas.

The book closes with a short "Final Words" chapter, including lesson ideas for how students can use the Organization and Website Resources.

All the Resources and many additional readings and activities are posted on our website at www.rethinkingschools.org/rg, and will be regularly updated.

—The editors

global literacy must come to be seen as a basic skill in every school. It is more urgent than ever that students take a profoundly critical look at the direction the world is headed. How is the reach of the global market impacting cultures everywhere? What are the consequences of the vast and growing inequalities of wealth and power? Is this the best we can do? What alternatives can we imagine? Addressing questions like these is not simply important from an academic standpoint. It is literally an issue of survival.

We hope this book will join the conversation

about how we can meaningfully teach for global justice. And we encourage you to contribute to this conversation, perhaps by signing up for the Rethinking Schools critical teaching listserv (instructions at www.rethinkingschools.org/rg).

As we think about nurturing student success, let's remind ourselves that yes, we teach to secure the future of individual students, but that future is intimately linked to the future of other people around the world — and of the earth itself. ■

—Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson