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SCARING CHILDREN ABOUT NUCLEAR WAR

If you thought the courses on nuclear war were designed only for senior and high school students, you are in for a shock. They are planned for K-12 (that means Kindergarten through Grade Twelve).

This means that nuclear war has joined sex education as the only two subjects which are taught over the entire 13-year span of pre-college education. Nothing else is taught for so many years — not reading, writing, English, math, or science.

Plans are moving rapidly to have all the nuclear war curricula in place when schools open this fall. The teachers' manuals are massive, complete with bibliographies, film listings, and study guides.

For example, a Cambridge, Massachusetts outfit called Educators for Social Responsibility has shown its responsibility (or lack of it) by developing an elaborate "Planning & Curriculum Resource Guide Dealing With Issues of Nuclear War in the Classroom." The most interesting part of this study manual is the descriptive reading list on nuclear war prepared for grade school and high school students.

Books for Kindergarten through Grade 3: "Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes": a story about an 11-year-old Japanese girl who, nine years after Hiroshima, is found to have leukemia resulting from radiation exposure. "Potatoes, Potatoes": a story about a mother's attempt to shield her two sons from war and their eventual involvement in it. "The Stranger": a fable about people who in fear bring out their cannon against a giant-stranger, but when they finally get to know him, invite him to stay.

Books for Grades 4-6: "Let's Cry for Peace": stories of two children, including a brief history of the peace movement with poems and songs appealing for peace. "The War Party": a young Native American looks forward to his first battle, but when he participates in it, is horrified by its brutality.

Books for Junior High School. "In the Sky Over Nagasaki: An A-Bomb Reader for Children": on the effects of the Nagasaki bomb written from the point of view of a camphor

tree that survived. "Living Beneath the Atomic Cloud: Testimony of the Children of Nagasaki": vivid descriptions by children who were 5 to 12 years old at the time of the bombing.

"Children of the A-bomb": descriptions by Japanese who were junior high school students when the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. "The Watch on Patterick Fell": a story about how demonstrations force the shut-down of nuclear power plants and waste disposal facilities in the England of the future.

Books for High School Students: "Cambridge and Nuclear Weapons": outlines the devastation which would result from a nuclear attack and suggests that prevention is the only valid form of defense. "Psychosocial Aspects of Nuclear Developments": on psycho-social aspsects of the arms race, US-USSR relations, and the accident at Three Mile Island.

"Nuclear Madness—What You Can Do": by Helen Caldicott, who is described in the bibliography as "a passionate opponent of nuclear power and weapons." "Hibakusha": a description of the effects of the bombings on Japanese survivors. "Black Rain": a novel about a family who lived through the Hiroshima bombing. "Unforgettable Fire": drawings and paintings by survivors of the A-bomb in Hiroshima, collected 30 years later.

If children are forced to read books like this, it's no wonder they begin to believe they have no future. A Yankelovich survey concluded that young people are "unhappier today and under greater tension than they were a generation ago, or perhaps even a few years ago." He linked this shift specifically to the perceived threat of nuclear war and the sense of futurelessness.

The only feeble attempt at humor I found in examining a half dozen of these dreary, depressing courses on nuclear war was a comic strip in the NEA-sponsored curriculum called "Choices." One person in the cartoon says to the other: "Just imagine, God created all this in only six days." The other person responds, "Hah! Big Deal! We can wipe it all out in six minutes."

If you are not laughing, maybe you should investigate the course on nuclear war which will be taught in your children's school this fall.