

LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Imagining Nuclear Weapons' Firepower — the Bee Bee Demonstration

Teacher Tools

Blackboard or large piece of paper, a box of 2,225 bee-bees, or a bag of 2,225 dried beans or corn kernels, a large biscuit tin or similar metal container

Aim

To think critically about the current status of nuclear weapons

To use the imagination to envision nuclear dangers as well as a world without war

To create a safe opportunity for discussion on feelings about the nuclear threat

To take action for disarmament and building a peaceful world

The Bee Bee Demonstration

Albert Einstein, great inventor, Nobel laureate and anti-war advocate, said “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Because it is difficult to comprehend the destructive force of nuclear weapons, this demonstration helps us imagine the power of the nuclear threat through sound.

Explain to students that they will hear 2 sounds: The first sound represents the total firepower contained in all the weapons used in WWII — including the nuclear bombs dropped on Japan. That is, 3 megatons of TNT represented by the sound of a single bee-bee dropping into the metal tin. Hold up the bee-bee and then drop it into the empty tin. It makes a “ping” sound. Ask them to think about and name the firepower used in WWII i.e., bullets, bombs, grenades, etc. Once again drop 1 bee bee in the tin, restating that all the munitions they just identified are represented by the sound of 1 bee bee. (Repetition will ensure that students understand the analogy).

Explain that since WWII, countries with nuclear weapons have multiplied. Among the 9 nations (United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, France, Israel, India, Pakistan – and most recently, North Korea) that have nuclear weapons, there are approximately 27,000 nuclear weapons on the earth, mostly owned by the United States and Russia.

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Now, introduce the second sound. Tell students that the total firepower of the world's current nuclear arsenal is represented by the sound they are about to hear. Emphasize that this sound does not include all the bullets, bombs, grenades, and other conventional weapons; only the equivalent firepower of the nuclear weapons deployed today. Ask them to close their eyes, and to remember that each bee bee represents the firepower of one WWII. Gradually, pour the entire contents of the box of 2,225 bee-bees into the tin.

After the last bee bee drops, take a moment of silence.

Step Five: Speaking About Our Feelings

After a moment of silence, ask students how they felt when they heard the sound of all those bee bees: *How did this demonstration make you feel? What do you want to say about it?* Use an object such as a ball that students can pass to one another when they have something to say. The student or teacher holding the ball is recognized as the speaker. Students can choose not to say anything and pass the ball on. This method assures that all students will be given the opportunity to speak if they feel moved to do so. Validate students' feelings by reflecting back to them what they have said and allow enough time for all students to speak.

Many students have reported feeling 'angry,' 'sad,' 'frightened,' and 'numb.' When confronted with this level of violent destruction, these emotional responses are perfectly healthy. You can say to students: "If you feel angry or sad when you hear this demonstration then you can be assured that you are alive. There is blood coursing through your veins. Your heart is beating. You are a healthy human being." You might want to mention also that there are connecting emotions to feelings like anger and sadness. When we feel angry this can often indicate a desire to see change. Anger can fuel our passion for right action. When we feel sad this is almost always an indication of our capacity for love and compassion. Remind students that these connecting emotions such as compassion and a sense of urgency, can be motivating factors for social change.