

FAMILY AND WAR

Emily Ulbrich
Exploratory
Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, IL

[Assignment: Our examination of war and its influence on social values has relied primarily on fiction and non-fiction prose statements. Other responses to war, of course, also suggest useful ways of looking at reality. Photographs from World War II not only recorded historic events, but implied certain beliefs about what was valuable and provocative. Less subtly, government posters offered public instruction to all citizens on how to support the war effort. The photographs and propaganda posters provide different messages for us perhaps than they did for observers fifty years ago, but they are worth close consideration nonetheless. In this essay: 1. Select any one photograph or poster or cartoon as your subject. Identify a theme that the picture suggests. 2. Imagine a reader who has not seen your subject and must rely on your representation of it. 3. Describe the picture in such a manner that its essential details are specifically represented. 4. Explain how the picture treats the theme (for instance, love, hope, despair) and how that treatment is informative to you and your audience.]

People often imagine war as fierce fighting and terrible death. However, there is another side of war just as horrid. It involves those left behind when a man or woman is called to battle. The focus of war is usually on the soldier and the battle on the field. He or she wages a much greater struggle, however, with the pain and torment of leaving family behind. They, too, fight a terrible battle with the departure of a husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister who may never come back. One photograph captures this battle and forces the viewer to see human suffering that is just as real and painful as a typical battle fought on the field.

This black and white photograph shows a father saying good-bye, possibly forever, to his young son. The facial expressions of the two slaps the viewer into the realization that soldiers are not the only ones who fight a war. Immediately the viewer senses the pain of leaving and the possibility of no return.

A soldier who appears to be in his late twenties is kneeling down with his son who appears to be around three. The boy is supported on the right by his father's bent knee. Ironically, on the left side of the boy, his father's gun is positioned upright, imprisoning the boy and framing the picture. The father holds the boy and the gun, showing the clash of two opposite worlds: life, innocence, and hope versus death, fate, and despair.

The boy shies away from the gun, and all it represents, and leans toward the security of his father's knee. His arms are curled up towards his chest. His fingers are contorted and intertwined with each other, giving the feeling of nervousness as well as complete despair. He seems not to know what else to do with himself. His face cries with anguish and that immediately pulls the viewer into his world of despair. Almost in anger, the boy's face is somewhat turned from his father's stare. He seems to be thinking "Why? Why? Why?" His inability to look at his father shows his complete incomprehension of the entire situation.

His blonde, tumbled hair and white sailor's suit gives the boy an even greater sense of innocence. This innocence opposes the dark army uniform of his father and the dark background. The innocent always lose in war. This boy is losing his father through no fault of his own. War has already, in a sense, killed his father. The years he spends away at war are forever dead.

In the father's face, the viewer also sees heartache. He tries not to cry, but this only makes his despair more apparent. His forehead has deep lines of pain sewn in. Desperately, his chin rests on his son's shoulder, his head slightly angled toward his son's face. The father tries to be strong, yet at the same time, his left arm is wrapped around his son, holding him tight, holding him for the strength to survive. His battle has already begun.

The power behind this photograph does not stem from the love behind these particular two people. It stems from the realization that the son fights this war, too. It stems from the fact that this man could be your father, husband, or brother. It forces the viewer to deal with the idea that war makes people leave behind more than a job and a home. They leave behind all the people they love. They leave behind their life.

This father is not going to be out in a field somewhere fighting for a national cause. Instead, it seems, he will be fighting to get back to his son. He son is his only hope for life. His son will be the ultimate goal of this war, the thing he fights for.

The idea of not knowing whether or not these two, or any two people in this situation, will ever touch each other again also comes shining through. The boy cries as if his father is already dead. The father seems to be holding his son as if he is on his way to his own execution. They hold on, hoping against hope to hold on forever. In his memory, the father records the sight, sound, feel, and smell of his son. His memory may be all he will ever have of his son again, just a memory.

Scenes like these bring back the morbid reality of war. Glory in war can only be found in the movies. War is not about heroism, glory, national pride, stopping the enemy. War is about leaving families, leaving all that one loves, and stepping into a terrible game of roulette, a game of predator and prey. It is simply killing those who want to kill you. However, as this photo ultimately shows, the soldiers are not the only ones that die in war. Families die as well.