

# Throne of Weapons and Tree of Life



Global Citizenship classroom resource  
Key Stage 3-4

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## Introduction

The Throne of Weapons and the Tree of Life are two of the most interesting recent acquisitions to the British Museum's collections. Both objects have been made from decommissioned guns (such as AK47's) that were collected at the end of the civil war in Mozambique in 1992. Both the Throne and the Tree are products of a project call 'Transforming Arms into Tools' which was established in 1995 by the Christian Council of Mozambique with the support of Christian Aid.

This classroom pack contains some suggested activities, designed to stimulate a classroom work using the two objects as starting points.

The Throne of Weapons and the Tree of Life are contemporary sculptures made from decommissioned weapons of Russian, East European, North Korean and Portuguese origin. They are the products of a co-operative venture launched by Bishop Dinis Sengulane of the Christian Council for Mozambique on October 20, 1995: Transforming Arms into Tools (Transformação de Armas em Enxadas or TAE)



under the patronage of Graça Machel, widow of Samora Machel the founding president of Mozambique, who later married Nelson Mandela. The inspiration for the project came from the biblical reference in Isaiah (2.4) '*..and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*'

The aim of TAE is to establish a culture of peace in a country which suffered 16 years of civil war fuelled by the apartheid regime in South Africa, ending in 1992. Agricultural, domestic and construction tools

are given in exchange for weapons handed in under amnesty; these are cut up and given to a group of Mozambican artists working at the TAE premises in Maputo, who turn them into sculptures. 2005 marked the 30th anniversary of independence in Mozambique and the start of a year-long programme celebrating African culture entitled *Africa 05*.

The Throne of Weapons was purchased by the British Museum in 2002 and displayed in the Sainsbury African Galleries alongside more traditional stools and chairs. The British Museum installed a new work by four TAE artists, the Tree of Life, at the beginning of February 2005. This piece was jointly commissioned by Christian Aid and the British Museum, and formed part of the Museum's contribution to *Africa 05*.

As part of the *Africa 05* programme, the Throne of Weapons went on a tour to a range of institutions in order to show the role that museums can play in contemporary society and how they can act as a springboard for debate. The role of the international arms trade, local gun crime, conflict resolution, sustainable development and the power of art were among the issues addressed via the Throne of Weapons tour and some of these have been developed further in this pack. Institutions visited by the Throne during the tour in 2005/2006 included Pentonville Prison; Liverpool and Coventry Cathedrals; schools and community colleges in London, Leicester, Cardiff and Coventry; and museums in Bristol, Gateshead, Leicester, Coventry, Cardiff, Manchester, Perth and London.

## Using this pack

The activities in this pack have been designed for use in the classroom by Secondary teachers. They can be used in conjunction with a visit to the British Museum or independently. The pack contains a series of activities and links to additional resources.

A PowerPoint to accompany this pack can be downloaded from the Museum website.

## Curriculum links

### Citizenship

- global dimension
- responsibilities and participation
- conflict resolution
- debating topical issues
- the work of non-governmental agencies

### RE

- peace
- studying the work of religious charities
- different religious teachings on topical issues such as war
- values and commitments
- empathy with the experiences of others

### English

- speaking and listening
- understanding others' points of view and experiences
- writing and drama opportunities

### Art and design

- expressing ideas through art
- art as controversy
- the personal and social meanings of art

## Key Stage 3-4 Citizenship: Human Rights

- Many children were forced into becoming soldiers during the war in Mozambique and many others suffered as civilians.
- With the class read the following story by Senhor Sousa Manuel Goao. He was a young man who became a soldier. Although in his early twenties when he was kidnapped his experience is not dissimilar to that of many children at the time.

'My name is Sousa Manuel Goao. I live in a small village in Maputo in Mozambique. When I was 23 years old I was kidnapped at gunpoint by anti-government rebel soldiers. I found myself with other young men that had been kidnapped. We were all forced to march for 150 miles – with no shoes! Some of the men tried to run away but they were caught. The soldiers lined them up in front of the rest of us and shot them. I was so frightened. I think they did this to stop anyone running away.

After days of marching we finally arrived at a training camp in the middle of nowhere. We learnt how to survive We also learnt how to raid farms and attack other people. We took whatever we wanted. We also kidnapped men to train as soldiers, men, women or children. It didn't matter.'

(adapted from a Christian Aid resource, *Guns into Art*)

- Brainstorm with the students what their needs are as young people.
- Compare these with the rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (find this at: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>) and ask the students to identify which rights they enjoy. What happens if these rights are taken away?
- The UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child states that "These rights include protection from all forms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and cruelty, including the right to special protection in times of war and protection from abuse in the criminal justice system."
- How does this compare to the account given by Sousa Manuel Goao?

## Key Stage 3 Citizenship: When the fighting is over...

- On the next page are ten cards, each with a word or phrase relating to a feature of post-war situations. Select nine to use with the class.
- Discuss these with the students checking they understand and asking them sometimes to think of a situation which relates to each.
- Ask students to diamond rank the cards according to which issue they think it is most important to deal with at the end of a war or conflict.
- Discuss the decisions of the different groups. Introduce the tenth card and discuss where that might go in their rankings.
- Does the Throne of Weapons/Tree of Life project address any of these issues?
- Can art have a role in social reconciliation? In general, should art have a social function?

When the fighting is over...

Cards for ranking activity

destruction of homes	shortage of food
refugees far from home	loss of loved ones
trauma of seeing horrors	anger at actions of the enemy
violence as a way of life	breaking up of communities
lack of medical facilities	easy availability of weapons
loss of normal law and order	loss of normal professions, jobs

### **Key Stage 3-4 Citizenship: Community safety**

- When people are aware of the damage done by guns and knives, why are they so reluctant to give them up? Discuss with the students the issues to do with respect, self-protection, identity and status?
- What actions by police or other agencies can be taken to support movements against weapons?
- What is the role of Operation Trident in the UK? Look at the website: [www.stoptheguns.org](http://www.stoptheguns.org). What messages does this site communicate to young people?
- Encourage the students to see the differences between the civilian urban context and post-war Mozambique and, for example, the difficulties encountered in the decommissioning process for IRA weapons or with Operation Trident.
- What role do objects like the Throne of Weapons and Tree of Life have in addressing issues to do with gun crime? Look at the evidence from the Throne of Weapons Tour to see different responses to the Throne in different parts of the UK. Information about the tour is available on the British Museum website: <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/pdf/throne.pdf>

### **Key Stage 3 RE/Citizenship: The role of religious charities**

Many religious charities around the world work in war zones or in countries suffering from the aftermath of civil war.

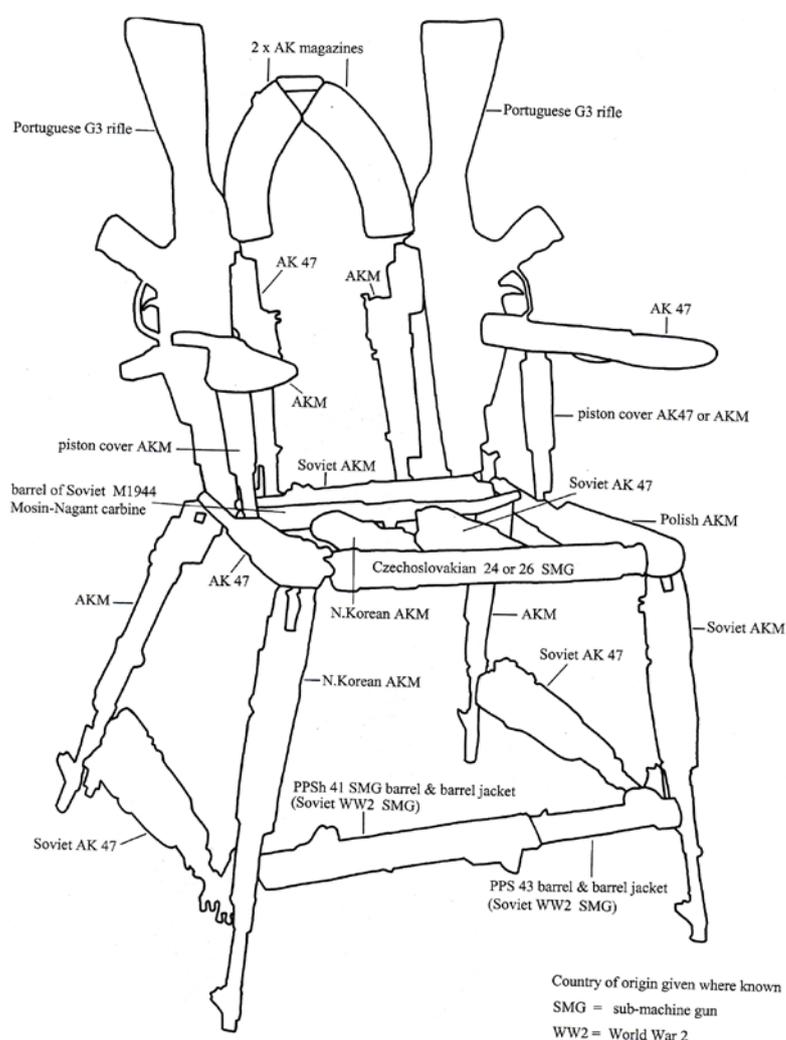
- Discuss with the students what different faiths teach about charity and charity work.
- Ask the students to research the work that organisations like Christian Aid do in war-torn countries?
- What is the impact of some of this work? What would happen if these organisations were not able to work within local communities?
- How can arts-based projects highlight the work that religious charities do around the world?

### **Key Stage 3 Art and Design: A shared view'**

- Ask the students why the artists chose to develop a tree or a throne? What do the sculptures say about the impact of the civil war in Mozambique on the lives of the artists?
- What other symbols show either growth or power? What other symbols of hope and peace can they think of? Can they find any other examples from other artists they know?
- Brainstorm with the students if art can have a role in furthering peace. What are the social responsibilities of artists? What has been the role of war artists in showing the realities of war?

## Key Stage 3 Citizenship: The international arms trade

- Look at the line image of the Throne of Weapons on the PowerPoint. The chair is labelled with the different types of guns it is made of.
- Where do these guns come from? Ask the students to find out where the guns are sourced? How do the guns get into the country?
- In December 2006, 153 governments voted at the United Nations to start work on developing an international Arms Trade Treaty. For more information look at the Control Arms website: [www.controlarms.org/](http://www.controlarms.org/)



## Key Stage 3 English: Throne of Weapons

The poem below was written by a Zimbabwean poet working in Newcastle. The poem was inspired by the Throne of Weapons.

### Throne of Weapons by Nkosana Mpofu

A monument to death  
those who never heard your thud  
Now shelved in graves and caves  
You wrecked your way  
And now you pose here  
Down a trail of havoc  
Asking me to admire.  
Challenged, I stare  
Trembling at your serenity  
Mundane and tranquil  
Inviting not threatening  
The conflict between guns and chairs  
You play me the fool.  
You bred turmoil and toil  
Fear, confusion and dread  
Determined and incorruptible  
Amputees, orphans, the widowed cursed you  
Conceal your past and cradle me.  
You dismissed lives  
Your prowess broken  
Impotent arms, prick backs, elbows  
A monument of silence  
To those who never heard your thud.

- What does the poem say about the impact of war? Ask the students to pick out words that describe the affect of the war on the people of Mozambique.
- What does the poem say about the impact of the Throne of Weapons on people who have seen it?

## Resources

PowerPoint: this is available via the Learning and Schools and teachers links on the Museum website:

[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

British Museum Tour of the Throne of Weapons

[www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/throne.pdf](http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/throne.pdf)

## External links

Christian Aid

[www.christianaid.org](http://www.christianaid.org)

Unicef – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

[www.unicef.org/crc/](http://www.unicef.org/crc/)

Every Child Matters (Summary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/uncrc/articles/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/uncrc/articles/)

Operation Trident

[www.stoptheguns.org](http://www.stoptheguns.org).

Calling the Shots (A resource produced by the Mayor of London's office which includes additional Citizenship resources)

[www.callingtheshots.org.uk/](http://www.callingtheshots.org.uk/)

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Nkosana Mpofu