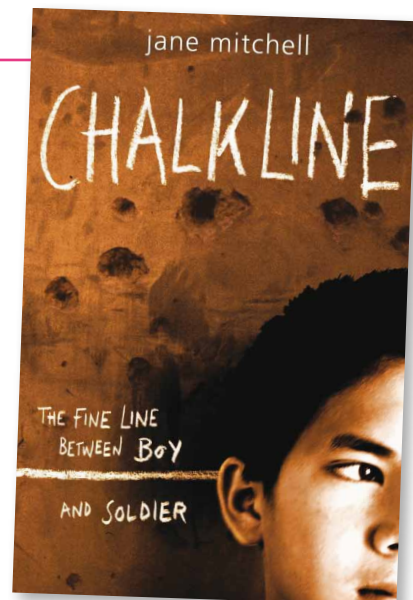


CHALKLINE

by Jane Mitchell

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(Lower/upper secondary)



Soldiers of the Kashmir Freedom Fighters are in search of new recruits at nine-year-old Rafiq's school in rural Kashmir. They scrawl a line in chalk on the schoolroom wall. Any boy whose height reaches the line will be taken to fight. Rafiq is tall for his age and becomes the first boy to cross into a life of brutality and terrorism. So begins Rafiq's transformation from child to boy soldier, indoctrinated into a cause of fanatical belief. But even when he no longer recognises himself, his family remembers the boy he was and hopes he will return.

BACKGROUND

Chalkline is set in Kashmir, in the Himalayan mountains in the northernmost corner of India. India, Pakistan and China all claim the area and armed conflict is common. Amnesty International has received reports that armed groups use child soldiers in the region. It is estimated there are between 250,000 and 300,000 child soldiers around the world.



IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

ROLE PLAY

Re-enact the scene where the armed group arrives at the school to take new recruits. Afterwards talk about the feelings of the various characters: teachers, boys who were taken, boys who were left, and the 'soldiers'.

PREDICTION EXERCISES

(If reading as a group)

- After the boys are taken from the school, what will happen to them?
- When Jameela and her mother set off for the market in Chapter 21, what do you think will happen that day?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are the boys conditioned and brutalised by their captors?

Possible answers:

- Competition eg for food and drink; assault course
- Encouraging patriotic and religious feelings, fighting for Kashmiri independence, for Allah
- Punishment – beatings for falling behind or not working quickly enough
- Replacing family – making the boys feel they are brothers
- Fear – killing boy who tries to run away; boys that disappear; treatment of boy who chases bus (stoning)

2. Rafiq's father said on an earlier occasion '*It is always right to seek freedom from oppression ... Freedom is every man's greatest gift. If you are not free, then you are nothing. But there are right ways and wrong ways to gain your freedom.*' (p71)

What different ideas of freedom are there in the book?

Possible answers:

- Freedom of Kashmir from Indian rule
- Jameela and other girls' freedom to learn
- Freedom of the villagers from raids
- Freedom to practise religion

3. What do you think of the ending of the novel?

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 4: Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone else our slave.

Article 18: We all have the right to believe in whatever we like, to have a religion, and to change it if we wish.

Article 26: We all have a right to education and to finish primary school which should be free. We should be able to learn a career or make use of all our skills. Our parents have the right to choose how and what we learn. We should learn about the United Nations and about how to get on with other people and to respect their rights.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Find out more about child soldiers:

- Watch *In Conversation with Ishmael Beah*, a former child soldier www.protectthehuman.com/videos/in-conversation-with-ishmael-beah-ishmael-s-story
- Read his book *A Long Way Gone* (Sarah Crichton Books).
- Find more information at www.child-soldiers.org including details of Red Hand Day, the annual day of action on 12 February.