

What has War done for us?

An idea for a short mini-drama based on the original John Cleese sketch 'What have the Romans done for us?' in the film *Life of Brian* (& also a variation used by him years ago in the BBC advert 'What has the BBC done for us?').

In the Romans sketch John Cleese is trying to stir up an insurrection against the occupying Romans by showing that they have done nothing for the country. So he says to a small crowd 'What have the Romans done for us?' expecting them to say 'nothing'. But instead they keep coming up with positive things (like roads, clean water, wine ...). Each time one of these is mentioned, Cleese says, 'OK, apart from (& lists all the items mentioned).....*what* have the Romans done for us?' Eventually the crowd cannot come up with anything else so he says 'See. The Romans have given us nothing!'

It needs three people (or more), one being the questioner (Q) below and two people (or more) who offer contrasting replies (Person 1 and P2 below).

The purpose is to make the audience think about a range of topics related to war and peace.

A playlet along the lines of What have the Romans done for us?

Three people: The Question (Q) person is trying to rubbish the idea of war.

Person 1 is standing up for war. Person 2 presents the downside of war.

Q. (*disgusted tone*) What has war done for us?

P1 (*proudly*) It's shaped lives.

P2 It's destroyed lives.

Q : OK, it's shaped lives and destroyed lives,.....But *apart from* shaping lives and destroying lives, *what* has war done for us?

Person 1 (*shifty looking around*) It's given us conscription

Person 2 It's given us conscientious objection

Q : OK, it's given us conscription and conscientious objection.....But *apart from* shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, *what* has war done for us?

P1 It's given us warlike feelings

P2 .. and feelings of evil done in our name

Q: OK, it gives us warlike feelings and evil feelings.But *apart from* shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, warlike feelings and evil feelings, *what* has war done for us?

P1 It's given us discipline (*stands up straight with hands by side*)

P2 ... but I was only obeying orders (*shrug of shoulders*)

Q: OK, it gives us discipline and keeps us obeying ordersBut *apart* from shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, warlike feelings and evil feelings, giving us discipline and keeping us obeying orders, *what* has war done for us?

P1 It's given us victory!

P2 It keeps us looking back in the past

Q: OK, it's given us victory which we keep looking back on.But *apart* from shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, warlike feelings and evil feelings, giving us discipline and keeping us obeying orders, giving us victory which we keep looking back on, *what* has war done for us?

P1 It's helped emancipation of women (chorus of '*right on sisters*', & *clenched fists salute*)

P2 So that they become soldiers (*do a mocking salute*)

Q: OK, it's helped emancipation of women so they become soldiers.....But *apart* from shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, warlike feelings and evil feelings, giving us discipline and keeping us obeying orders, giving us victory which we keep looking back on, helping emancipation of women so they become soldiers, *what* has war done for us?

P1 It's given us a feast of war films and games

P2 And leaves us hungry for visions of peace

Q: OK, it's given us a feast of war films and games, leaving us hungry for visions of peace.....But *apart* from shaping lives and destroying lives, conscription and conscientious objection, warlike feelings and evil feelings, giving us discipline and keeping us obeying orders, giving us victory which we keep looking back on, helping emancipation of women and they become soldiers, giving us a feast of war films and games leaving us hungry for visions of peace, *what* has war done for us?

(*all silent for a few moments*)

Q See !!! War has done *nothing!*..... (then glances around at everyone)
Has it?

Peter Nias The Peace Museum Dec 08