

PRINCIPLE

BRING THE ISSUE HOME

By using creative visuals, telling powerful personal narratives, and highlighting local costs, we can make an otherwise abstract, far-away issue personal, visceral, and relevant.

CONTRIBUTED BY

Jodie Evans

Jodie Evans has been a peace, environmental, women's rights, and social justice activist for forty years who has traveled to war zones, promoting and learning about peaceful resolution to conflict. She co-founded CODEPINK: Women for Peace, is the board chair of Women's Media Center and sits on many other boards, including Rainforest Action Network, Institute for Policy Studies, and Drug Policy Alliance.

Rae Abileah

Rae is a social change strategist, writer, educator, and advocate for collective liberation and economic justice.

"WHEN THE LOCAL CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBAL POLICIES ARE HIGHLIGHTED, PEOPLE'S CIRCLE OF CONCERN OFTEN WIDENS."

"If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow."

—Rachel Carson

The destruction of a far-off rainforest. The carnage of war thousands of miles away. People care, but usually not enough to act on that concern, at least until they understand viscerally what's at stake. Here are a few ways to "bring the issue home":

Show the human cost

When the Iraq War was raging, mainstream media didn't show the stream of flag-draped caskets coming off planes or images of bombed buildings and dead Iraqis. Most Americans, with the exception of military families, didn't viscerally feel the war's impact. To bring the human cost of war home, Nancy Kricorian, a CODEPINK activist in New York City, stood outside her senator's office and arranged a row of shoes of all sizes tagged with the names of Iraqi civilians who had been killed, and asked passersby to "walk in their shoes." Her gesture was picked up and repeated across the country. In a similar spirit, veterans met on the beach in Santa Monica, California, on Sundays during the Iraq War, to set up a field of white crosses in neat rows across the beach — one for each soldier who had died. It was a powerful reminder of the human

POTENTIAL RISKS

If you're going to highlight the cost of a far-away war, be careful to never focus solely on the financial cost. Imagine if peace advocates only held up signs about the amount of money spent on a war, with no mention of the lives lost. If you want to draw attention to the financial cost, alongside it always give the human cost its due.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Conflict Kitchen
- Dow Chemical Apologizes for Bhopal
- Pedestrian death puppets
- Pyramid of Shoes
- Stolen Beauty
- Taco Bell Boycott

cost of war, at once intimate and horrific (see: PRINCIPLE: Make the invisible visible).

Make it personal

Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum was recently planning to expand its operations in the Peruvian Amazon jungle. Well-researched pleas to halt the drilling got nowhere. That all changed when a delegation of native Achuar people (who would have been displaced by the drilling, and their ancestral lands ravaged) traveled to the US to share their story. The issue shifted from stopping an oil project (relatively abstract and impersonal), to defending people's homes (far more concrete and human). Occidental had to cancel the project, and the Achuar are pursuing legal claims against Occidental for environmental damage already done. Bringing forward the names, faces, and stories of your far-away issue (see: PRINCIPLE: Lead with sympathetic characters) makes the consequences of inaction far more real and relevant.

Put a price tag on it

If people don't connect to the human cost of an issue, reaching their pocketbooks is another route. In 2005, when the historic Steinbeck Library in Salinas, California, was threatened with closure due to drastic budget cuts, farm workers and peace advocates joined forces and held a twenty-four-hour read-in to keep the library open, drawing attention to the money spent on waging wars rather than other priorities. Before the read-in, few in Salinas cared enough about the Iraq war to protest it; twenty-four hours later, the entire community understood how the high price of occupation affected them. When the local consequences of global policies are highlighted, people's circle of concern often widens.

Originally published in Beautiful Trouble.

LEARN MORE

Rethink Afghanistan (Part 3): The Cost of War

Rethink Afghanistan, 2009

<https://beta.prx.org/stories/42846>

Guide to Creating a "Walk in Their Shoes" Display

CODEPINK, 2012

<https://www.womenoccupy.org/2012/02/guide-to-creating-a-walk-in-their-shoes-display-at-a-bank-of-america-action/>

- Walk a mile in her shoes

Tactics

- Artistic vigil
- Creative disruption
- Creative petition delivery
- Electoral guerrilla theatre
- Lamentation
- Public art intervention
- Visibility action

Principles

- Balance art and message
- Know your cultural terrain
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Make the invisible visible
- Simple rules can have grand results
- Think narratively
- This ain't the Sistine chapel
- Use the power of ritual

Theories

- Abolition
- Action logic
- Artivism
- Cultural hegemony
- Environmental justice

Methodologies

- Action star
- Battle of the story
- Hardship to grievance
- Points of intervention

TAGS

Action design, Campaign strategy, Communications, Environment, Indigenous rights, War and peace