



# Current Affairs Assembly

KS3 Active Citizens: Getting involved

## Taking a stand for right

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### Aim:

- Examining different approaches to taking a stand for what you believe in

### Introduction

Two very different, famous people have recently hit the headlines for taking a stand for what they believe in.

- Brian Haw died on 18<sup>th</sup> June this year. You might not know his name- but you may well have seen photos of his 'peace protest' tent which has been erected for the last 10 years on the pavement of Parliament Square in London.
- Aung San Suu Kyi, a Burmese opposition politician, recently released from 15 years imprisonment and house arrest, is the guest lecturer this week on the BBC Reith lectures. (Every year, the BBC invites an important figure to deliver a series of lectures, known as the Reith Lectures, named after Lord Reith, the first Director General of the BBC.)

Both Brian Haw and Aung San Suu Kyi chose to make a peaceful protest about something that they deeply believed in.

### Looking Deeper

**Brian Haw** protested for 10 years in Parliament Square against the UK and US foreign policy which took these countries into the Iraq war, which he believed was profoundly wrong. During all that time, he lived in a tent on the pavement, just inches away from the main traffic lanes, making his peaceful protest! His placards and leaflets exposed all that he believed was wrong about the war.



Image <http://en.wikipedia.org>

With his supporters, he shouted messages through a megaphone at politicians as they entered Parliament and got his message across to the millions of people who passed through the square. UK politicians tried all sorts of tactics to remove him, even changing the law to make his camp illegal, but through it all, he won the legal battles. In 2007, he was named as 'The Most Inspiring political Figure'! A life-long smoker, he died of lung cancer in June this year.

Originally a teacher, Brian Haw was motivated by his Christian beliefs, believing that the Iraq war was wrong, and that the US and UK should never have attacked Iraq. His peaceful protest upset many people including politicians, the military and the families of British service-people killed in Iraq. He made a huge sacrifice for his beliefs- during his protest, his marriage broke down and he became estranged from some of his children and friends. Eventually, his health broke down too.

**Aung San Suu Kyi** is a Burmese opposition politician, the leader of the Burmese National League for Democracy party. Having won 59% of the national votes and 81% of the seats in the Burmese Parliament, she has never been allowed by the military rulers to take her rightful place in their parliament. Instead, they detained her under house arrest for almost 15 of the 21 years from 20 July 1989 until her eventual release on 13 November 2010.



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Image <http://en.wikipedia.org>

In 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

By inviting her to give the Reith Lectures this week, she is being given an international platform to express her views on liberty and freedom. Motivated by her deep Buddhist faith, she says that her mind has always remained free despite the imprisonment, and that this inner sense of freedom has been her essential resource. She too made huge sacrifices for what she believed in – under house arrest in Burma, she was unable to raise her children who were in England, and was absent from her husband when he became terminally ill and died.

Although opposed to violent protest, Aung San Suu Kyi doesn't believe in doing nothing to right wrongs! She talks a lot about acts of 'loving kindness', by which she means getting involved in protest and action to right wrongs by peacefully doing something about it. She cites the Buddhist monks who in 2007, stood up in protest for the people who were suffering badly because of soaring food prices. She believes profoundly that there is a strong inter-relationship between practical

action and private spiritual discipline. In other words, a person's spiritual beliefs must be expressed in practical action. It's no use just 'being holy' and doing nothing to right wrong!

In the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, the writer describes three ways in which people can respond to injustices they see:

- The fool who lets his two hands hang down and doing nothing
- The fool who has two hands which are preoccupied by stress and work for personal gain, too busy to tackle injustice
- The wise person who deliberately holds out one hand to cradle tranquillity and spiritual peace while the other hand is busy righting wrong.

This third wise person sounds just like Aung San Suu Kyi's description of acts of loving kindness, where practical action is balanced by spiritual discipline!

- Like Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese monks, what acts of 'loving kindness' are you prepared to do today?
- How will you take a stand for something that you believe is right?
- If you are holding onto the spiritual things that matter to you in one hand, what practical action to help others less fortunate than yourselves will you take with your other hand?
- Or will you be like the fool and let both your hands hang down, neither seeking spiritual strength with one hand nor doing anything practical with the other hand?





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## Reflection

If you are holding onto the spiritual things that matter to you in one hand, what practical action to help others less fortunate than yourselves will you take with your other hand?

## Prayer

Lord God, help me to be like the wise person. Help me to seek truth, peace, tranquillity and spiritual strength while at the same time expressing loving kindness to others less fortunate than me.

## Keywords

Peaceful protest

Aung San Suu Kyi

Brian Haw

Standing up against injustice

Taking a stand for right

Loving kindness