



Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violent Play

Jane Katch

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The five-and six-year-olds in my class have invented a new game they call suicide. I have never seen a game I hate so much in which all the children involved are so happy.

So begins *Under Deadman's Skin*, a deceptively simple-and compellingly readable-teachers' tale. Jane Katch, in the tradition of Vivian Paley and Jonathan Kozol, uses her student's own vocabulary and storytelling to set the scene: a class of five-and six-year-olds obsessed with what is to their teacher hatefully violent fantasy play. Katch asks, 'Can I make a place in school for understanding these fantasies, instead of shutting them out?'

Over the course of the year she holds group discussions to determine what kind of play creates or calms turmoil; she illustrates (or rather the children illustrate) the phenomenon of very young children needing to make sense of exceptionally violent imagery; and she consults with older grade-school boys who remember what it was like to be obsessed by violence and tell Katch what she can do to help. Katch's classroom journey-one that leads her to rules and limits that keep children secure-is an enabling blueprint for any teacher or parent disturbed by violent children's play.

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