

## Suffer the Little Children

<https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=65203>



### General Information

<b>Source:</b>	NBC News	<b>Resource Type:</b>	Video Documentary [Long Form Specials/Datelines, etc.]
<b>Creator:</b>	Robert Northshield	<b>Copyright:</b>	NBCUniversal Media, LLC.
<b>Event Date:</b>	01/11/1972	<b>Copyright Date:</b>	1972
<b>Air/Publish Date:</b>	01/11/1972	<b>Clip Length</b>	00:47:21

### Description

In this 1972 documentary, NBC News spends one month in Belfast, Northern Ireland, a city plagued by violence between Catholics and Protestants. Though much of the fighting occurs between members of the Irish Republican Army and British troops, the victims who seem to suffer the most are the children of Belfast. This story may not be suitable for younger viewers.

### Keywords

Belfast, Northern Ireland, "Suffer the Little Children", Irish, Ireland, Peace Line, Catholics, Protestants, Religion, Christianity, Catholicism, Roman Catholic, Protestantism, United Kingdom, UK, Great Britain, England, English, British, Violence, Poverty, Poor, Hate, Hatred, Segregation, Children, Kids, Church, Town, Neighborhood, Community, Ghetto, Tradition, Culture, Folk, Singing, Folk Singing, Music, Folk Music, Law, Treason, Death, Funeral, Killed, Ulster, British Army, Soldiers, Troops, Military, Guns, Weapons, Fighting, Shooting, Fear, Invaders, Defense, Special Powers Act, "Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) 1922", Terror, Terrorism, Long Kesh, Her Majesty's Prison Maze, Internment, Imprisonment, Jail, Prison, Irish Republican Army, IRA, War, Working Class, Capitalism,

Murder, Guerillas, Guerilla Warfare, Urban, Armored Vehicles, Patrols, Stress, Trauma, Disturbance, Nun, Teacher, Classroom, School, Harassment, Queen's Guard, Guardsmen, Riots, Rubber Bullets, Loyalists, Parents, Family, Psychiatrist, Psychiatry, Divided, Education, Love, Suspicion, Jesus Christ, Documentary, Reporting, Journalism

## Citation

### MLA

"Suffer the Little Children." Robert Northshield, correspondent. *NBC News*. NBCUniversal Media. 11 Jan. 1972. *NBC Learn*. Web. 2 December 2017

### APA

Northshield, R. (Reporter). 1972, January 11. Suffer the Little Children. [Television series episode]. *NBC News*. Retrieved from <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=65203>

### CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

"Suffer the Little Children" *NBC News*, New York, NY: NBC Universal, 01/11/1972. Accessed Sat Dec 2 2017 from NBC Learn: <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=65203>

## Transcript

Suffer the Little Children

ROBERT NORTHSHIELD reporting:

His name is Joe McCann. He spent November, 1971 in Belfast. So did we, a documentary film unit from NBC News. Everything you will see and hear in the next hour was seen and heard in that one month, November, 1971. It is very little of what happened to that troubled city that month. The most significant thing that happened to Joe McCann that month is that he existed on one side of something called the Peace Line, an iron wall that separates Catholics and Protestants. The wall is an official acknowledgement of the power of fear and a guarantee of continued hatred. Nowhere else in the world, only in Belfast, do the official maps make such a guarantee.

MORRIS FRASER, psychiatrist: Somebody pointed out to me the other day that the Trouble was now entering its fourth year, which carries, for most people, for me certainly, the frightening implication that there are children now running about the streets who have never really known a normal life.

H.A. LYONS, psychiatrist: Of course, the thing that we would be very disturbed about as psychiatrists, are the long term effects in children. What we are doing in Belfast, is that we're rearing another generation of bigots, who are learning to hate.

NORTHSHIELD: Among many things Christ said but these passionate Christians didn't hear was this, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. For of such is the kingdom of God."

Every Catholic neighborhood in Belfast is a ghetto. Not each ghetto is poor, but everyone who lives there

is impoverished by the fact of segregation. This is a world of tradition. Some of it is beautiful. Some of the tradition is of treason and of glories that never were. And there are new traditions growing. The funeral of Michael McLarnon on the first day of November was the first of its kind that month. There were nine more before November was done. Through them all there were children growing.

Preacher: O God who was always ready to be merciful and to spare, we make this prayer to you on behalf of your servant Michael, whom you've commanded to depart this life. Bid your holy angels receive him and lead him home to paradise.

NORTHSHIELD: Violence and pathos are ever more common in Belfast now, but they are only a part of the long tradition of poverty, unemployment, bitter hatred and family love that form a boundary around a Catholic ghetto. Within it, there are a subjugated minority, few hopes, many fears, and dozens of myths about an Ireland that once included four kingdoms, but now has but three. Ulster, this place, is the one that's lost.

The British Army has been in Northern Ireland, in force, this time since August, 1969. Since July, 1970, the British Army has been at war with the Roman Catholic community. Both sides are losing. On this November afternoon, a patrolling soldier was shot. And in his enemies there was no compassion.

The war is fought relentlessly, probably finally, on hundreds of bizarre battlefields.

JOE McCANN: Then I got through the middle of the [unintelligible] road. Then some man opened up on the soldiers. They fired about ten shots, but the bullets did not hit any of the soldiers. Then I ran to [unintelligible].

Boy #1: On Leeson Street, I was caught in a shooting incident. An [unintelligible] bomb went off and I was scared to death.

Boy #2: I climbed on a wall and I saw two men on stretchers. They were police men. And I saw—I shall tell you how they were shot. A car pulled outside a bakery on the Irishman's Turn Road and a man and a woman got out. At the same time, the police car was stopped outside. Suddenly there were shots. The man and the woman ran out and got in a car and got away.

FRASER: In reality, a lot of these children are terribly frightened. Now, to me, their British soldier is more or less the kindly Tommy. But I have to accept that children in a certain culture have been brought up with a very strong concept of their Irishness, and that they do regard the British as the invader. And even before the first rubber bullet is fired, the British soldier has the image of the jackbooted invader. And these children are terrified of the soldiers, and they believe that they have to defend themselves. I have been in riot situations and I've experienced this fear myself. When you see these chaps coming through the smoke with their visors, their guns, and their shields, it's a terrifying experience. I've seen people-- children, adults-- turn absolutely chalk-white when the soldiers appeared. And I think that this element of fear has been very much underplayed and underestimated.

NORTHSHIELD: Every night, the warriors celebrate with old myths and new hopes. And the war comes home.

What happened to us was made possible by a law that would be unthinkable in the United States. It was designed 50 years ago to take terror off the streets. Since it was invoked again last August, about a thousand people have been taken to this place, interned without trial, hearing, or confrontation with

charges. It is called Long Kesh. It is a limbo. In November, there were about 500 men in Long Kesh, every one of them was reported to be a Roman Catholic. Long Kesh and the Special Powers Act are monuments in a war that the society and its authorities still fight against the Irish Republican Army. The government hoped to stop the IRA and its fighting by interning all its leaders, but the war has intensified dramatically since then. The modern IRA has the same old goal—a union of Northern Ireland and the republic to the south. Some of its soldiers are children.

Unidentified Female IRA Member: We are taught to respect weapons, not to become trigger-happy. If we could have a peaceful revolution, we would want this, but this is an impossibility, because as I said earlier, the capitalist system are not prepared to give up their riches and hand it over to the working class, who make the profits for them to keep them in their positions without a struggle. So, we have to make this. And if they use weapons against us, we will certainly use weapons against them.

NORTHSHIELD: Have you ever had reason to use this weapons training of yours?

Unidentified Female IRA Member: Yes I've used a gun, but I've never killed anyone.

NORTHSHIELD: But, have you seen people killed?

Unidentified Female IRA Member: I've seen people killed, yes.

NORTHSHIELD: And surely you're prepared to do such a job if it's necessary, I suppose?

Woman Member of Irish Republican Army: I'd be prepared to defend myself and any of my friends. But it's a very hard thing to go out deliberately to kill. We don't do this, we defend. If the British Army are going to shoot at us, we shoot at them. It's either kill or be killed.

And we don't use violence. We use defensive action. We don't preach, you know, the kind of Gospel, "go out and have a riot and shoot British soldiers for the fun of it." There's a reason why they're shot. And the reason is because they shoot our people, they murder our people. They subject our people to torture and brutality. And they can't be allowed to run wild. If they came over here and thought they'd get away with it, we'd be suffering a hell of a lot more than we are. But you must understand that we are a guerilla, an urban guerilla group. And we pick our time and our place.

NORTHSHIELD: And do you feel that as of now you're about even? Do you owe them any or are they ahead of you or are you ahead of them?

Unidentified Female IRA Member: Well it's not a game of numbers. You know, we're not playing games. We don't put up scores. We are the army of the people. It's not a cowboy show, you know. We don't keep on record how many British soldiers we have killed. But we remember all the Irish people who have been murdered at the hands of British forces.

NORTHSHIELD: You must be too young to be involved in the weapons training, Sean. What do you do?

SEAN: We get trained on weapons, but we don't use them out in streets, like the army.

NORTHSHIELD: Do you know how to use weapons?

SEAN: Yes.

NORTHSHIELD: Which ones?

SEAN: Luger. Short arms.

NORTHSHIELD: And you've had target practice since armed?

SEAN: Yes.

NORTHSHIELD: Did you use live ammunition?

SEAN: Yes, down in the south.

NORTHSHIELD: Sean, could you kill someone? Would you be willing to use that pistol?

SEAN: If I have to. If I'm called out to do it, I will use it.

NORTHSHIELD: Have you worked with explosives?

SEAN: Not yet. Just what we're going to put in the road. We've been taught about explosives.

NORTHSHIELD: And how old are you?

SEAN: Fourteen.

NORTHSHIELD: On each November morning in 1971, part of the British Army did its slow march through part of its homeland. The soldiers sought hidden arms and ammunition in specific enemies of the state. Sometimes they found some. On this morning while we watched, they seem to find nothing more than children late for school because of the excitement.

So tell me about the soldiers, what do they do?

Girl #1: Um, when was it? It wasn't last night, but the night before, they came around. You know every night my mommy will come in and leave our Damien in the bed with me and, um, help him with his purse. She'd done that and then I asked her, "Would you get me my toy telephone?" She went in and got it and when she went out again, all we heard was 'bang'-- you know, glass breaking, she always break glass-- this big tall door, and then there's a big giant hole in the step to go up. There's this big tall door and there's a big glass window and they were all smashing at that window—they were smashing away at it and then you heard two rubber bullets. And after that, they came into our house and the soldiers [unintelligible] went into Damien's room and were just stirring her and stirring her—you know, with me and Damien. After that they asked my daddy to get on his coat and Mommy says to him, "Where are you going?" and Daddy says "I don't know." And then after that, they took him down to the hole. Mommy had his tea out on the pan in the oven.

NORTHSHIELD: This is a Catholic school, so the girls here are more familiar with the war than are Protestant children in public schools. Joan McKnight is a very good student, usually. She showed us her workbook and her writing assignment. She had been given a grade of 'Excellent.' Between that lesson and the next, a bomb went off at night near her home. Next day, she tried to repeat the assignment.

Girl #2: I have nothing to tell you.

NORTHSHIELD: Don't you have anything to tell me? Why you-- don't, no leave that, don't touch it sweetie. Tell me-- you started to talk before about Protestants. Do you know any Protestants?

Girl #2: No Protestants come down our way. There's a Protestant church though. The Protestants go to church.

NORTHSHIELD: What is a Protestant?

Girl #2: I don't know.

NORTHSHIELD: Are you afraid of them? Why?

Girl #2: I'm just scared of the soldiers.

NORTHSHIELD: Do you think they're the same as soldiers?

Girl #2: Yes. There are Irish ones and they have real bullets.

NORTHSHIELD: The soldiers have real bullets?

Girl #2: And the good ones have toy bullets.

NORTHSHIELD: Is that right?

Girl #2: Wee toy guns that just go ‘Cht! Cht! Cht! Cht!’

LYONS: I said earlier that by and large children weren’t disturbed psychologically in the short term. Of course we have some exceptions to this general rule. We have some very particular stressors that are operating in certain homes, such as some children see their homes being burnt down, some children witness relatives being shot dead, and then a third stressor that’s occurred in the last few months is the fact that fathers have been taken away. So, some children have seen the army calling through the night, taking their father out of bed, and the father has been missing from the home now for three or four months. And this is a stress. And this will certainly cause considerable disturbance in these young children.

NORTHSHIELD: So—where-- is your daddy home now?

Girl #3: No.

NORTHSHIELD: Where is he?

Girl #3: Long Kesh.

NORTHSHIELD: And do you know what Long Kesh is?

Girl #3: It’s very long, I’ll tell you that much.

NORTHSHIELD: How long has he been there?

Girl #3: I couldn’t tell you because I don’t know.

NORTHSHIELD: When will he be home, do you know?

Girl #3: I don’t know. My mommy said he may be home at Christmas, but he said “Don’t be checking your wishes off” because he [unintelligible]. That’s all I know.

NORTHSHIELD: Most of the girls like to talk to us. They were demonstrative and open and trusting.

Michelle was unique. It seemed that there had been a terrible loss of innocence.

Are they prettier when they’re white? But if they were so pretty, I wonder why they changed their color. What color are they now?

MICHELLE: White.

NORTHSHIELD: They’re white. But then the soldiers came in and they painted them a different color.

What was that?

We went back to St. Vincent’s school on another day that month. There had been a change in the classroom.

Catholic Nun: Well, she had this fear all the time. The mother did say to me that she was going, “Will the soldiers be back again tonight, Mummy?” The mother called today, she mentioned to me that during the raids the soldiers had destroyed their home. Wanton destruction. Put up the floorboards and broken down the staircase. So she said she just couldn’t live another day in the home. And she hasn’t told anyone where she’s gone.

NORTHSHIELD: Now, how did this harassment show itself in Michelle?

Catholic Nun: Well, in school she was very upset and cried a lot and we couldn’t find out what was wrong with her. And at home, the mother told me that she couldn’t leave the living room. Michelle cried every

time she left the living room. And going to bed at night, the light had to be left on, and in fact the mother had to sleep in the bed with her. So she thought, rather than bring up the child under these conditions, it would be better to move out to this new house. And no one around the district knows where she's gone. It's the only way that she can go so that she can have peace, which she hopes to find there. Whether she will or not, it's another story. She may be followed by the army.

British Officer: I have no doubt that most of you who are viewing today have seen the guards in London in their ceremonial duties and have witnessed the discipline and bearing of the guardsman on those occasions. This same discipline and bearing and attitude are expected from the soldiers known after. We arrived in Ireland about August of 1971. We took up the duties-- our duties in Belfast-- as part of the internal security situation. During the time we have been here, we have suffered a number of casualties, having had four men killed and about 37 wounded, either by bullet or by bomb-blast or by stone throwing.

FRASER: These children are not freaks, they're normal children in a very abnormal situation, indeed. This is a situation in which the boundary between fantasy and reality is-- has become very blurred, indeed, as can happen in a very stressful situation.

NORTHSHIELD: The opposing forces sometimes come together peaceably. This place is a school for some and a barracks for the others. It is a place where daydreams meet nightmares.

FRASER: These children are living in a situation in which the image of daddy has become projected onto other members of the community in which they live. And this produces in these children tremendous fear, and it's this stress that leads to the blurring of the boundary between fantasy and reality. So that in the street, you could have children, one night, playing at riots, using tomato sauce for blood. And the next night, they're having a real riot, and it's real blood. They just don't know the difference anymore.

British Soldier #1: The kids come up, they start throwing stones at us. I mean, we just clear the roads of the stones, all the sudden somebody opens up on you from a hedgerow, there again, one of you might get hit. What can you do? You look around, all you see is kids looking at you. Little kids throwing stones. You don't see the gunman lying the hedge. Or you don't see him behind the window or around the corner or from the back of a car. All you see is a sea of little faces looking at you. Obviously you can't start shooting, indiscriminately. Blasting off at little kids. There you are again, one of you is hit. Nothing there but a lot of kids. Nothing you can do about it. You just gotta take it as it comes.

British Soldier #2: We can't take sides, here. Protestant or Catholic, it makes no difference to us, we're soldiers. We got nothing to do with politics or anything like that. As for myself, I've no scruples with these people here-- There you go. There's a shooting starting up. Here we go. [Unintelligible]

NORTHSHIELD: The guardsmen did their ritual walk through this unfriendly part of Britain. They found nothing as usual.

Many of the soldiers are armed with weapons that fire something huge and hard called rubber bullets. It sounds humane. Usually they move among their countrymen with tenseness, with restraint and courage. There were 14,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland in November. Fifteen of them were wounded in Belfast that month. Seven were killed. And on another morning, more than a thousand soldiers made a massive search of another Catholic ghetto. "There," one of them told us, "it's the only war we have."

Just one shot, a rubber bullet was fired.

Woman #1: Please! Look at her! Show them what the soldiers did! She was in the house! Show them! Mommy show them!

Woman #2: She was in the house. She was in the house.

Man #1: Have a look at that. In her own home. In her own home. I know, put her leg in.

NORTHSHIELD: Most of the people in Belfast are neither Catholics nor soldiers. The Protestants defeated the Catholics in 1690 and the two sides act as though it happened yesterday. The Protestants have the jobs, the money, the government, the control, and at least 110,000 licensed guns. They think of themselves as loyalists.

Woman #3: We're British. Other people think we're not, we're British people. And the British Army is our army.

Man #2: As a Protestant, this state was set up for me. And as a Protestant, I defend it.

Man #3: I think, myself, that the whole blame should be laid at the Roman Catholic Church for this, for the education of these children and not being integrated with Protestants and Catholics together.

NORTHSHIELD: On the Protestant side of the Peace Line, they were unwilling to have us meet their children. But one day, some parents met with us. On the same day, a prominent psychiatrist did, too.

LYONS: I feel the churches have been a dismal failure in Northern Ireland. They are completely divided, yet as you say, they have this basic thing in common that they are Christians and they should be preaching love, whereas their people are hating.

NORTHSHIELD: That hatred brought the British Army into Northern Ireland in 1969. Its military mission was to build the Peace Line between the two groups of British Christians. Even now, most of one regiment spends its afternoons keeping Protestant schoolchildren on one side of a road and Catholics on the other.

LYONS: The two communities are completely divided into the Protestants and the Catholics, and the leaders of each church constantly snipe at each other, instead of uniting together to lead the people to love one another. The Catholic children, they go to Catholic schools, and the Protestants to Protestant schools, so even before our present troubles, there was no mixing of the children at all. And I think one of the answers in the future is that religion must be withdrawn completely from education. And religion must be made a personal thing, and not a political or an educational issue at all.

NORTHSHIELD: On several afternoons in November, we saw the Peace Line breached. The army tries to keep them apart and let the wall build itself higher and the majority sometimes abandons its silence.

Woman #3: I thought there was good and bad on both sides, but there's not. Because if there was good Catholics, the IRA wouldn't be getting away with it, and they are. Because there's somebody harboring them somewhere. And if they want the decent life for their children, which all of us want for ours, they'll go out and work, and they're shouting about what the Catholics get and what they don't get. The Catholics get more than the Protestants ever got.

Woman #4: And I'm sure the children on the other side, as we say on the other side, I mean the Roman Catholic children, I don't know what sort of children they're going to grow up in. When a child of your own can come out with a shotgun or a machine gun, it seems beyond it. And when you've seen the women on the TV, actually said they would put their daughters out for these people to turn and follow

them, because they were going with a British soldier, where's the motherly love in that? I can't see any.

LYONS: Well the love should come, originally, from the parents-- from the example of the parents. But the example that the children are getting in Belfast at the moment, and how it's been for many years past, but especially now, is to hate because the parents hate. And the children then learn to hate from the parents.

Man #2: Nothing has hardened the opinion more than this trouble now, and as I said before, there are only a lot of gangsters and loots.

Woman #5: I don't think we'll ever get together—our generation anyway. No, there's too much hatred, killings, bombings, all this. And I don't think—in any way, our generations—we'll see it.

Man #3: Well I would like to see that, for my kids and my children's children, that there be no talk of religion. People in other countries can live without mentioning religion.

Man #2: What I'd like to see, the children educated together and sort of, get to understand each other and understand each other's problems. But I'm afraid it'll not happen, in this generation anyway, because as I said before, things are just too bad now. And, as I said before, I think it's the Roman Catholic Church that's mainly responsible.

LYONS: Hatred comes from suspicion and fear and it is taught by the example of the parents, the example of the leaders, the politicians, the various societies that exist teach the people to hate. But it's largely based on fear and suspicion of what's going to happen to them.

Woman #5: And I always had Roman Catholic chums. In fact I had two at my wedding. But since the troubles, I waved across the Peace Line at one, she lived just facing North Howard Street here, and she was frightened to wave back at me, and I've known her for ten years.

Mrs. MILLS: I'm a long time in this street. I'm about nearly seventy years in this street, so I know a good lot about it anyway, but still with all the Protestants and Catholics are not fighting, it's the IRA and they're doing all the damage that they can be done, and I just think that...

Woman #6: Hello Mrs. Mills, how are you?

MILLS: Hello. Not so bad at all.

Woman #6: You getting interviewed?

MILLS: Oh dear. Wouldn't do you, they wouldn't interview me.

Woman #6: Well that's true.

NORTHSHIELD: Do you have children?

Woman #6: Pardon?

NORTHSHIELD: Do you have children?

Woman #6: No I have just one married daughter, but I was burnt out on Copper Street.

NORTHSHIELD: What effect do you think the troubles are having on the children?

Woman #6: Well I don't think it's very good for the children at all, both Catholic and Protestant, I do not indeed. And I do think what the world needs is Jesus, just a glimpse of Him. And if the both sides would get down on their knees and ask God to forgive them, this would be a better world to live in. And I hope and pray that Catholic mothers and Protestant mothers all realize that, because it's the children—the children there—is the future of this world.

NORTHSHIELD: What do you think of the troubles? What do you think is happening?

Boy #1: [Unintelligible] It's the IRA that's doing it.

NORTHSHIELD: Do you know what a Catholic is?

Boy #2: Yeah.

NORTHSHIELD: What is a Catholic?

Boy #2: It's a man who believes in a different religion.

NORTHSHIELD: Do you know?

Boy #1: It's a man that causes trouble, he can join the IRA, and the IRA bombs up all the pubs-- and the Catholics are—the Catholics make trouble.

NORTHSHIELD: How do you know what a Protestant is?

McCANN: See, I always knew because mummy always told me, "Don't be going up or you'll maybe get beat up by some of them, 'cause there's some bad ones up there." And she told me that there are Protestants.

NORTHSHIELD: Well what is a Protestant, do you know?

McCANN: No I don't know.

FRASER: I think it would be fair to say that the churches haven't done nearly as much as they might have done, and their attitude is very strange, the whole situation. This is a situation which they have in part produced by their rigid policy of segregation over the years. And I believe that you can't build this big wall between two communities, tell them they mustn't mix, and then scold the people for fighting. I think you can't have both ways. You must either integrate a community, or if you're going to segregate them, you can't complain if aggressions build up between the groups. And clergy are calling the people thugs and hooligans, but these people are just acting out their very fears that the church has implanted in them over the years.

NORTHSHIELD: What do you think is going happen in the future? What will it be like to grow up here?

McCANN: Don't think it'll end.

NORTHSHIELD: You think what will end?

McCANN: I don't think the troubles will end.

NORTHSHIELD: You don't? What do you think will happen?

McCANN: I think they'll just keep on going on.

NORTHSHIELD: They've got to end sometime?

McCANN: Aye, sometime, but I don't know when. Nobody knows.

NORTHSHIELD: What would happen to all the people if the troubles kept going?

McCANN: Be more dead, and all them.

LYONS: If one looks at Northern Ireland history, or Irish history, over the past hundred years, you'd find that there have been riots approximately every decade, and this may be one of the reasons for this. For the new generation that is coming up to hate. So this is the most pessimistic thing, I think, about our present troubles. It's not that the children are being very disturbed at the moment psychologically; it's the effect it's having on their personality development at this very important stage of their life.

