

Nobody needs a gun

Discussion

In Britain it is illegal to have a gun without a licence. Following the Dunblane massacre in Scotland in 1996, when a madman killed almost an entire class of primary school children and their teacher, the laws on gun possession have become very strict. The same is not true in the United States, where many more atrocities involving guns, such as the Columbine incident described below, have taken place.

1. Has anything like Dunblane or Columbine happened in your country?
2. Can you remember any similar incidents in the news?

Read the slogan of the United States National Rifle Association (NRA), which has a lot of political influence in the US.

I'll give up my gun when you take it from my cold, dead hands.

3. What do you think about an organisation that has this as its slogan?
4. Are guns legal in your country? Are they easy to get?
5. Do you or does anyone you know own a gun? Why? Why not?

Reading

On April 20, 1999, two teenage boys at Columbine High School near Denver, Colorado, USA, shot over 30 fellow students, killing 12 of them — before taking their own lives. The following point of view was posted on an interactive website a few days later by someone from Britain. Read the text, then answer the questions below.

THE COLUMBINE MASSACRE

What is it going to take for America to get the message? How many more young lives are we going to see wasted? How can the pro-gun lobby in the US still have such a powerful voice? After the Dunblane massacre here in 1996, gun control laws, which were already strict, were tightened further. There was a nationwide amnesty on handguns. Many who had guns, for whatever reason, gave them up. They were sick of what guns were capable of. People even questioned whether shooting should remain an Olympic sport. Dunblane shocked the whole nation and the effect remains to this day.

But in the US, politicians are more worried about upsetting the pro-gun groups and losing votes than

protecting innocent people! Ordinary citizens argue that they should be free to arm and defend themselves in accordance with the 'Second Amendment'. Defend themselves against who? The country isn't under attack! The civil war ended over 200 years ago!

Most people in Britain have never seen or handled a real gun – even our police don't carry them – but in America you can buy one on a Saturday afternoon shopping trip. What has happened to a country that it can carry on with one massacre after another and do nothing? We're supposed to be 'cousins' but the family resemblance is not very strong any more. I don't recognise their culture. A country that can't ban guns has lost its head, and its soul.

Discussion

Answer these questions with a partner:

1. What is the overall tone of the article – anger, sarcasm, sympathy, something else?
2. If you were an American, would you take offence at this article?
3. Could someone from your country write a similar article with very similar arguments?
4. How does the writer compare the Dunblane massacre to the Columbine massacre?
5. Do you think the writer has ever been to the United States?
6. Could the writer apply any of his or her criticisms to countries other than the United States?

Language 1

Use these words to complete the opinions on guns and gun laws below:

weapon outlawed in self-defence
illegal lives

1. I think guns should be made
2. If guns were , then only criminals would have them.
3. Guns don't take People do.
4. Anything can be used as a lethal
A gun is simply one of them.
5. I think someone is only justified in using a gun

Circle the opinions above that are most similar to your own. Do your classmates agree?

Discussion

Guns and you

1. In which of the following situations would you use a gun?
 - a. To defend myself against an intruder in my house.
 - b. In self-defence against an attacker on the street.
 - c. To hunt animals.
 - d. For sport on a firing range.
2. Do you know where you could buy a gun if you wanted one?

Guns and films

Answer these questions in pairs or small groups:

- a. Groups who want to ban guns say that it is impossible to think of three films in which a gun never appears. Can you prove them wrong?
- b. Why do you think guns are so prominent in films?
- c. Do you think that gun-violence in films has a direct effect on gun-related crime?

Guns and kids

Is it OK for children to play with toy guns? Did you do this when you were younger? Would you let your children play with toy guns?

Is it all bad news?

Do guns have any positive roles in society? Use the expressions below to help you express your ideas.

If we didn't have guns, we wouldn't have ...
It's because of guns that we ...
We have guns to thank for ...
I'm not in favour of guns, but I must admit ...

Language 2

Look at this sentence from the text:

People even questioned whether shooting should remain an Olympic sport.

Even is used to emphasise a point you are adding. Use the correct ending for each sentence below:

1. Anybody can buy a gun –
2. Some teenagers carry guns around –
3. I wouldn't use a gun –
4. Hardly anybody carries a gun in Britain –
5. I think guns should be banned completely –
 - a. *they even take them to school.*
 - b. *even toy ones.*
 - c. *even kids can buy them.*
 - d. *even if I was attacked.*
 - e. *not even the police.*



"Gun control? Over my dead body!"

