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Russia Holds 'Peace Defenders' Open Lesson on Ukraine Invasion

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Russia held an online open lesson for children Thursday to shape domestic opinion toward the invasion of Ukraine that has triggered worldwide condemnation and anti-war protests.

The Education Ministry's "Peace Defenders" lesson presented Moscow's hotly contested version of events explaining why President Vladimir Putin ordered an attack on Russia's democratically elected neighbor last week.

It followed widespread reports of schools planning similar lessons in at least four Russian regions including Moscow in recent days. An audio recording of a heated exchange between a teacher and a student published this week highlighted the generational and ideological divide among supporters and opponents of the war.

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“Students will be told why the liberation mission in Ukraine is a necessity,” the Education Ministry said in its announcement of Thursday’s open lesson.

Putin ordered the “special military operation” to “denazify and demilitarize” Ukraine last Thursday. The UN has recorded 227 civilian deaths and said more than 1 million people have fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion. Ukraine and Russia have reported troop casualty numbers that cannot be independently verified.

Independent Russian media outlets have been blocked for referring to the campaign as a war and thousands of Russians, including children as young as 7, have been detained for protesting. Russian lawmakers are pushing through vaguely worded legislation imposing jail sentences of up to 15 years for spreading “fake” information about the Russian military.

Russia’s Education Ministry said the half-hour open lesson offered a "backstory of today's events.”

“[These include the] danger that NATO poses to our country, why Russia stood up for the protection of the civilian population of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, and will also help distinguish truth from lies in the huge flow of information, photos and videos that the internet is full of today," the ministry said.

A young girl hosting the event said “we need to understand that everything is a little more complicated than it appears.”

Her adult co-host inside a sleek studio said “the Ukrainian crisis didn’t start yesterday and it’s not about Ukraine at all” before launching into a treatise on the Soviet collapse, anti-government demonstrations in Ukraine and the alleged persecution of Russian speakers in the country.

“Russia is a strong power that has massive strategic resources,” he said.

“How can you win a war with a nuclear power? You can’t.”

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