

ACTIVISM AND EMPATHY ChLA 2019 Indianapolis

Paper Title: ‘No pasarán! Juvenile activism on the streets: the Battle of Cable Street as told to children’

6,000 policemen (and they were all *men*)

3,000 members of the British Union of Fascists

100,000+ anti-fascist demonstrators including children and young people

85 arrests including 2 juveniles

These bare facts underpin accounts of the ‘Battle of Cable Street’, a working-class uprising in the East End of London on the 4th of October, 1936. Although the numbers are hard to verify, it is estimated that as many as 250,000 anti-fascist demonstrators converged to prevent Oswald Mosley and his ‘Blackshirts’ from marching through the largely Jewish East End of London. Children were among those who opposed Mosley – and the police who were protecting the marchers. Some threw marbles under the hoofs of the mounted policemen’s horses, evidently to good effect. One eye-witness who was fifteen at the time recalled the moment when, “Suddenly, the horses’ hoofs were flying and the horses were falling down because young kids were throwing marbles.” Girls went out armed with pockets full of pepper dust to throw in the faces of the fascists. This is far from the first time that children on the left of society had taken to the streets to demonstrate a political stance. Indeed, on the same day there was a large youth rally in Trafalgar Square in London in support of the Republicans fighting in Spain) Sometimes their street activities took the form of pageants, tableaux, short plays and processions on political themes and subjects. Most of these activities and the texts supporting them are long forgotten, but accounts of the Battle of Cable Street written for children continue to appear. This paper will provide a brief history of children’s political street performances before looking closely at selected works that present the events and legacies of Cable Street to young readers. The books encourage readers to understand themselves as activists; to realise that it matters what populations and individuals do and do not do, and that it is important to be informed and to form opinions at every stage in life.

AV needs: Powerpoint