Title of Lesson: Restorative Justice
Lesson By: Geri Belle
Grade Level/ Subject Areas: Sixth grade Humanities
Class Size: 20-25
Time/ Duration of Lesson: 4-7 days after the reading of the book

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson
• Students will be able to identify one or more situations in which they have been a victim, bystander, and/or an offender.
• When given a scenario, or a historical event that involves violence, students will be able to identify the players. These include: perpetrator(s), the victim(s), the bystander(s), and the community.
• Students will articulate the point of view of each of these players.
• Students will be able to give a definition and an example of the practice of ahimsa in writing or verbally
• In note form, students will be able to give a definition and an example of restorative justice and how it is related to ahimsa
• Students will be able to write about a real or conceivably real conflict involving violence, and how ahimsa could be used for reconciliation

Lesson Abstract
This is a lesson about Restorative Justice. It is meant to follow the reading of Touching Spirit Bear, described in the content section. In the spirit of what Gandhi called ahimsa, it will examine ways people might reconcile conflicts in a mutually acceptable way. It will also examine the role of the bystander in such situations.

Lesson Content
“"I believe non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.” - Mohandas K. Gandhi

Ahimsa is a Sanskrit word that is rooted in the word “himsa” meaning the desire to do harm. This includes both physical and emotional harm. According to the Mission statement of the Ahimsa Institute, nonviolence or Ahimsa is rooted in “courage and compassion, fearlessness and forgiveness”. In his article “Gandhi, Empire, and a Culture of Peace”, Joseph Prabhu talks about how ahimsa ‘respects the autonomy and the dignity of the other’, providing the foundation in which a person is open and willing to dialogue. The force of ahimsa enables one to see the truth and/or position of the other.

When conflict and/or violence is involved, the practice of ahimsa is more challenging. By providing a framework for each person in to talk about their own point of view, their “truth”, participants are often able come to an agreeable solution that draws on the power of ahimsa.

Gandhi based his life on this source of power. He is known to have said, “Hate the sin, love
Gandhi’s belief in ahimsa, and his ability to separate the person from their actions, enabled him to stay engaged with Smuts through the time it took to achieve his goals. He was able to do this without punishing Smuts in a traditional way. He was able to maintain dignity on the part of both parties, restoring justice to the situation.

Restorative justice is based on the willingness of concerned parties to be truthful about what transpired. It requires a willingness to try and understand why an action occurred, how the action has affected individuals’ lives, and the agreement to be mutually responsible for a constructive response. Parties engaged in the conflict, as well as the larger community, participate in creating the resolution. Restorative justice recognizes the culpability of the bystander who does not act to stop the action or address the context that allows the action to happen.

Different from our criminal justice system, restorative justice gives both the victim of the crime, and the perpetrator, the opportunity to talk about the crime, the context in which the crime occurred, the events leading up to the crime, and the impact it has had on lives. The perpetrator is given a way to make restitution to the victim and society in a variety of ways rather than simply being removed from society.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has used restorative justice to help an entire country grieve and heal after the violence perpetrated on its people during apartheid.

Cole Matthews, the main character in Touching Spirit Bear, is an angry 15 year old whose temper frequently gets him into trouble. His alcoholic father beats him, and his mother does nothing to protect him. When he beats up his classmate, Peter, he causes brain damage, and faces possible imprisonment. While awaiting trial, his parole officer, Garvey, offers him an alternative to a trial. He is offered a form of restorative justice based on Native American traditions called Circle Justice. This involves the victim, offender, and community coming together to find a healing solution.

Cole opts for this, not because he believes it will bring about healing, but because it is a way to avoid prison. It is decided that Cole will be sent to a remote island in Alaska for one year. He
is sent there so that he can consider what he has done and make the peace he needs to make with himself so that he will be able to make honest restitution with his victim. On the island, he seeks the legendary Spirit Bear, said to show lost seekers ‘the way’. Cole’s encounter with the bear leaves him almost mauled to death. He is hospitalized for six months. It is during this time that he re-views and re-considers his life. He learns to acknowledge his anger. He knows that while it may never leave him, he can learn to control it. Through his own reckoning, though the love that is shown to him, and his newly acquired understanding and knowledge of the sacredness of life, he finds a way to reckon with Peter, and the harm he has caused.

State Content Standards:
All of these are listed in the Massachusetts English Language Arts Framework.
Grades listed next to the standard.
• Pre K-8 2.2 Contribute knowledge to class discussion in order to develop a topic for a class project
• Gr.3-8 8.18 Summarize main ideas and supporting details
• Gr.5-8 19.17 Write a short explanation of a process that includes a topic statement, supporting details, and a conclusion.

Guiding Questions
• Who are the different parties involved in an act of violence
• How are the offender, victim, bystander and society affected by an act of justice?
• What are some ways restitution can be made when a crime occurs.
• What is restorative justice?
• How can the principles of restorative justice be applied to conflicts arising day to day?

Materials Needed:
• Book: Touching Spirit Bear

Lesson Context
This lesson fits into a larger unit on how individuals, groups, and societies deal with oppression in empowering ways. The digital story will be shown at the end of this lesson, and before we look at how groups and societies deal with oppression.

Teaching Activities
• Discussion about roles of victim, perpetrator and bystander in a conflict
• Discussion of the definition and role of a bystander in these conflict situations
• Students will identify roles played by the characters in Touching Spirit Bear
• Students list times in their lives when they’ve been a victim, an offender and a bystander
• Give a definition of ahimsa and talk about its use by Gandhi in South Africa and in India, and its use by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission today in South Africa
• Generate a brainstormed list of conflicts that occur at home and/or in the classroom
• Discuss how ahimsa can be used to resolve conflicts that arise in the classroom or in our homes
• Homework assignment is to identify a conflict at home or school and how ahimsa can be used to solve the conflict in a way that is mutually acceptable to the involved participants including community and/or bystanders
• See last sentence in Assessment/Evaluation section

**Assessment/ Evaluation:** *(how students will be evaluated or show mastery)*

In small groups student will identify the roles played by different characters and community in the book *Touching Spirit Bear*. Students will write a 1-2 page paper illustrating how a conflict can be resolved in a way that involves all the participants in a constructive way.

**Bibliography:** *(cite sources used in this lesson)*


