Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

**Title of Lesson:** Gandhi: The evolution of an ordinary teenager to an extraordinary teacher, humanitarian public servant and international non-violent leader

**Lesson by:** Diana Benn

**Grade Level/Subject area:** Tenth/World History

**Time/Duration of Lesson:** 55 minutes for 2-3 class periods

**Goals/Objectives of Lesson:**
Students can compare and contrast Gandhi’s personal changes from his early life under colonial rule to his later life as the non-violent leader of the independence movement.

Students can explain why Gandhi has political conflicts with the colonial power, Great Britain, due to racial/religious discrimination and his non-violent strategies to resolve those conflicts through ahimsa, fasting and the development of a movement that can sustain itself.

Students can compare and contrast Gandhi’s push for India’s economic shift from colonial status to a self-sufficient independent nation.

Students can analyze and internalize the impact of Gandhi’s life, works and humanitarian efforts on behalf of his own country’s independence and general welfare of his countrymen as well as his international recognition for contribution to conflict resolution, social change, human rights, democracy and environmental protection through ahimsa (non-violence).

**Kentucky Content Standards:**
Social Studies/High School-1.1.1. Students can compare and contrast (purposes, sources of power) various forms of government in the world (e.g., monarchy, democracy, republic, and dictatorship) and evaluate how effective they have been in establishing order, providing security and accomplishing common goals.

Social Studies/High School-2.3.1. Students can explain the reasons why conflict and competition (i.e., violence, difference of opinion, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, genocide, etc.) may develop as cultures emerge in the modern world (1500A.D. to present).

Social Studies/High School-3.2.1. Students can compare and contrast economic systems (semester, command, market, mixed, etc.) based on their abilities to achieve broad social goals such as freedom, efficiency, equity, security and growth in the modern world.

Social Studies/High School-5.3.3. Students can analyze how an Age of Revolution/Imperialism brought about changes in science, thought, government and industry (i.e., Newtonian physics, free trade principle, rise of democratic principles, development of the modern state) that shaped the modern world and evaluate the long-range impact of these changes on the modern world.

**Lesson Abstract**
This lesson is about Gandhi’s universal contributions to conflict resolution, social change, human rights, democracy and environmental protection through the use of ahimsa (non-violence). His evolution from an ordinary person with human frailties to become an extraordinary international humanitarian leader was achieved through many personal sacrifices for the betterment of the people of his own country and for the greater humanity. With Gandhi as a role model students can reflect upon their own responsibilities to commit to truth and humanity in general to act in the form of public service.
Guiding Questions:
1. How is Gandhi an ordinary teenager/person?
2. How does he become a teacher/role model to the Indian people, the British government officials and the world?
3. Why is becoming a humanitarian in South Africa as well as in his native India so important to him and his non-violent fight for India’s independence?
4. In the spirit of ahimsa (non-violence), personal swaraj (truth), and sarvodaya (welfare of all), how can students/teachers evolve for the betterment of yourself, family, community, nation and world?

Content Essay
Introduction
Mohandas Gandhi’s name has become synonymous with non-violent civil disobedience throughout the world. In the United States, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King’s personal and political journey leading the Civil Rights movement acknowledged that he too had learned from Gandhi’s efforts to use ahimsa (non-violence) in South Africa and India. Gandhi, as a role model, continues to influence various groups who still struggle for political, social and economic freedom around the world. Young people in war-torn countries are daring at great personal risk to follow in his footsteps. For the youth of our nation there is an absence of real heroes who have made a difference by sacrificing their own desires and needs; therefore, the need exists for students to have a thorough understanding of the personal evolution of Gandhi from someone close to being like them at their age to the person who accomplished the extraordinary on behalf of others’ human rights. The hope is that his personal journey will become more than an historical event, but provide the inspiration for their personal journey to find a purpose for their lives and attain their fullest potential in selfless public service. (Sethia, p.2-3)

Privileged Youth
Because he was born into the third highest caste, Modh Bania, in Porbandar, Gujarat in 1869, Mohandas K. Gandhi would be considered a member of the middle class in Indian society. (Parel, lxxviii) Thus, he had some privileges in that his father was a government official and the family maintained three homes. His family observed Hindu customs which meant no consumption of meat or alcohol nor relationships with women outside of marriage. For most of the world this held him to a higher social and moral standard which would necessitate personal sacrifices that most people would be unwilling to make. He was surrounded by a diverse religious community; for example, ”…his mother came from the Parami tradition—a syncretistic sect of Hinduism, which venerated the Quran as a holy book along with Vedic scriptures”. (Sethia, p.10) Hence it is clear how he would later not only have tolerance for other religions, but he also realized that all faiths should be able to coexist. Gandhi’s awareness of this would bring him to the conclusion that religious strife could be yet another divisive force impeding India’s unity as a nation.

By tradition he was engaged at the age of twelve and married at 13 in 1883 to Kasturba who would remain his lifelong partner until her death in prison in 1944. She had five live births; however, the first child that she had at the age of sixteen died. Gandhi blamed himself for his selfish treatment of her just prior to her giving birth. Gandhi revealed that as a teen he lied to his parents and stole money from them with the intent to smoke cigarettes. He also had a teenage friend who had money and took him to a brothel. Even though Gandhi did not participate, he felt guilty because he had been disloyal to his wife and regretted that he had caused her pain. Even though he accepted the arranged marriage as a part of his Indian social and religious traditions, he spent long periods of time continuing to neglect his wife and his marriage. The same wealthy acquaintance introduced him to meat, and he had to tell his family that he was not hungry; neglecting to tell them he had eaten meat.

As can be seen from these incidents in his youth, he was a normal teen who was often disobedient and dishonest. He enjoyed and put more effort into athletics, playing both tennis and cricket, while his education suffered. He described himself as a mediocre student; yet, he convinced his brother to finance his education in
London, England after he graduated from high school in 1887. The family seemed to realize his potential to achieve even if he didn’t.

**College Years in London: Vegetarianism and the Study of Law**
At nineteen, Gandhi was in London, the center of the civilization he had admired, but he struggled to fit in because he did not speak the English language very well, was homesick for his family and the foods he generally ate. While in London, Gandhi dressed and acted like an Englishman. Kasturba remained in India and resided with his parents by Indian custom. Away from all he knew, his life began to change as he met influential persons like Henry Salt from whom he adopted vegetarianism. While he consoled himself that he would be able to eat meat after his parents died, this illustrated the conflict with his inner self that would mark most of his life.

At this point in his life he was unwilling to totally give into the sacrifices his religion demanded of him. Gandhi would have to make his own choices for his own reason which was a new experience. This one about what he ate offered a moral stance he could take and even organize to influence others to take on vegetarianism as well. He began to become aware of the influence he could have on others and they on him. As he met others in the Indian community in London, he soon learned through conversations that many of them felt disenfranchised, wanting to take their nation back by force with violence, if necessary. After he read the works of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Emerson and Thoreau, he gleaned ideas of freedom, democracy and civil disobedience. These concepts would later form the tenets of his non-violent movement to crusade for the independence of India. By 1895, he had accomplished his educational goal as a barrister and returned to India; however he was not prepared to forego his status as a lawyer or alter the British gentleman image just yet. His focus was on sacrificing his own future to repay the obligation to his brother for the financial backing of his education.

**Home to India: Expectations from the Family and Community**
Upon his return to India in 1901, Gandhi was told that his mother had died while he was in England and the family chose not to tell him so that he could finish his studies. Since the religious community insisted he go through purification rituals since he had been contaminated with different ideas and experiences, he felt like an outcast again. Once he started to practice law, he discovered he knew British law but was ill prepared in Indian and Muslim law; therefore, this period was when he actually learned to practice law in his own country. Because he was financially indebted to his brother for his education, he worked for him and his law partner. This meant he had to share more of the settlements from cases he handled with them. When his brother was sued and Gandhi felt that he was being asked to compromise his principles, he decided to leave India after less than a year and take a case in South Africa for a Muslim businessman. Guided by his personal integrity, he placed his principles above his family which meant another personal sacrifice, leaving his wife and family behind yet again. This would strain his relationship with his wife and his children that would later haunt him.

**South Africa: Color and Competence in the Law**
Once he was in South Africa, Gandhi thought of himself as an English subject until he encountered for the first time that he had to remove his turban before being allowed to try a case. His wrong assumption was reinforced in another incident when he purchased a first class ticket on a train only to be told he was to move to a third class compartment. When he refused to move, the officials beat him and threw him off the train. He spent the night in the cold train station and upon reflection realized that he was treated not as an English citizen but as a person of color. “… the problems he needed to deal with were not the assault and humiliation that he was personally subjected to but the basic malady behind such acts—the color prejudice in South Africa. From then on … his effort (were) to devise transformative solutions to eliminate the root causes. (Sethia, p 2-3) To tackle the British oppression of all persons of color, Gandhi pushed himself to become more politically active.

After he established himself as a competent lawyer, he opened his practice in Johannesburg in 1904-1905. Financial security from this successful law practice enabled him to create the Phoenix Settlement in 1904 as one of those experiments to bring about moral regeneration for Indian men and women. After many conversations with them, he had become concerned about their desire to turn to violence as a means of separating India from the control of Great Britain. In the process he went through a phase of ‘spiritual striving, which provided him a
clear sense of purpose in life---self-realization as the fullest realization of his human potential to be attained through selfless public service.” (Sethia, p 2-3) Gandhi was concerned that these expatriate Indians were attracted to European revolutionaries which could bring about violent outcomes that would be dangerous for them all. He felt he had to make the person sacrifice to do something for his countrymen.

South Africa: Political Activism---A Test of the Power of Ahimsa

After his eye-opening personal exposure to racial prejudice, Gandhi became politically active in South Africa. The Black Act of 1906 caused Gandhi to act openly against blatant discrimination. At this point he made a choice to take a vow of celibacy for the rest of his life as part of his struggle or his person swaraj, sacrificing his selfish needs or desires for the good of all humanity. In 1908, after he recuperated from beatings from his protest activities, he negotiated a compromise with General Smuts who was the representative colonial authority of the Black Ordinance and Asiatic Registration Act. In 1908 Gandhi would lead Indians to meet at a mosque and burn registration cards in another protest; the Indian community had resolved not to submit to the Black Act. This confirmed his concept of truth or soul-force, satyagraha, where he was prepared to sacrifice his own well-being to change the hearts and minds of his opposition. One of the most pivotal events occurred in 1909 when he wrote Hind Swaraj on his return from England; this would become his blueprint for how to conduct his personal decisions and how to lead all the people of India out of slavery to freedom. Hind Swaraj would be banned in India in 1910, but by 1919 it was widely known in India despite this attempt at censorship. In 1910 Tolstoy Farm which was twenty one miles from Johannesburg became his second communal experiment. In 1913 in the Transvaal he led protests against a ban on Indian immigration as well as the legal issue of only recognizing Christian marriages which eventually led to a compromise with the government in 1914. His non-violent tactics were continuing to be successful but at great person cost to him.

Learning from but leaving the West: Preparing for Sarvodaya

After 1913 Gandhi no longer wore Western clothing. At first he did this to mourn those who had perished in the campaigns in South Africa and later this simpler dress was in defense of ordinary poor people in his native India. Gandhi was distancing himself from the Western/British civilization that he found problematic for himself and his country. While at the same time, he was focusing on the alternative which was to apply sarvodaya so that society would advance for the benefit of all by spiritual and ethical means, balancing rights with responsibilities. In 1914, he still believed that if he were to do his duty as a British citizen and organize the Indian Ambulance Corps, then Indians would benefit after WWI. Being responsible would bring respect, rights and equality. From the experiences in South Africa Gandhi would also benefit from learning nursing from an Anglican and find a model for his ashrams of prayer and constructive work from monks and nuns he had visited at Marianhill. Having completed his second stay in South Africa of close to twelve years, Gandhi had made the conscious decision that his life would be one of public service for the greater good of all humanity. He would use”…just means for pursuing just goals and grounded his struggle in the principle and practice of ahimsa (nonviolence).” (Sethia, p.2) Again, he had with great personal difficulty placed his relationship with his wife, children and family in jeopardy as well as increasing the risk to his own personal health and safety.

Fasting for Justice in India

After twenty one years in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and established an ashram at Ahmedabad. It would take until 1916 for him to make his first public speech. That same year he met with the Muslim League and the Congress to unite political factions. Despite the injury to his own wellbeing, the fast became a tool Gandhi often used to resolve conflicts; for example, he negotiated a settlement between factory owners and workers in 1918, stopped the violence in Chauri Chaura and pleaded for Hindu-Muslin unity. This would also be the year in which Gandhi recruited Indians to fight in WWI which again he thought would gain rights for Indians. Later he regretted that he had been complicit to violence. As with his integrity being compromised when he chose not to be involved in his brother’s law suit, he felt he had again betrayed his conscience. In 1919 the Amritsar Massacre occurred in which British troops fired on a peaceful protest made up of defenseless men, women and children. The officer in charge had even tried to set up a machine gun to kill even more of the group, but could not get it into the courtyard area. This was the same year as the Rowlett Act which gave the British marshal law powers to censor the press and arrest anyone for sedition. “…This hartal
was Gandhi’s first act of satyagraha directly against colonial law in India and also the first one for a nationwide direct action.”(Sethia, p.88) The tone was set for what would become his life’s work to free India using ahimsa.

Father of the Nation, Mahatma

To assess the needs of his country and the strategies for their self-determination, he traveled third class to Indian villages in extreme poverty from 1915-1920; and by 1921 Gandhi adapted the loin cloth after he realized there were those too poor to have any other clothes or in some instances no clothes at all. This choice of the humblest of clothing broke down class barriers, leading by example. He proposed that using the charkha, the spinning wheel, to make their own homespun cloth or khadi was the solution and a means to boycott British goods. These powerful symbols were about sustaining self-sufficiency at the grass roots level in order to sustain overall independence. “His view in regarding every nook and corner of the country as his home made him both bapu, the father of the nation, and a powerful leader and spokesperson of the Indian masses.”(Sethia, p.90) In his book, The Law and the Lawyers, Gandhi was debarred in 1922 “…on his conviction and sentence to six years in prison.”(Gandhi, Introduction) Again he was taking the moral high road at the expense of his law career. This was the ultimate professional sacrifice of giving up his livelihood. As Gandhi organized the various campaigns, he was transparent to the British as far as his planned actions in 1922 and 1923, contrasted to his position on WWI, he stuck with his opposition to WWII and Quit India. Gandhi opposed the war.

The 1930 Salt March brought international attention to Gandhi’s independence movement because his plan was announced to the British that he intended to walk two hundred and forty miles to the sea with the intent to break the law and make salt. Much to his own surprise, he was joined by thousands and fully expected to be arrested. An American newspaper commented that the British had lost America through tea and now India through salt. The wheel was now set in motion and there was no turning back. Since Gandhi had embarrassed the British government, he was arrested the next morning. Thousands continued the non-violent salt protests through the summer and were often beaten with steel clubs, fracturing their skulls and shoulders; many thousands were arrested. Because the movement could continue without him, he had succeeded in his goal of a grass roots operation for independence. Gandhi was released to negotiate with the government where a bargain was struck to release the prisoners and the boycotts/protests would be called off. In 1930 he appeared twice on the cover of Time Magazine and in 1931 he was Man of the Year. He was gaining international attention for his use of non-violence to achieve justice and India’s independence. Also, in 1931 he visited London in the working poor area of Lancashire where he was warmly greeted as Uncle Gandhi because of his empathy for the plight of workers in those factories and the downtrodden in general. In 1934 he continued his campaign to uplift the untouchables whom he called the Harijans”… ‘children of God’, a term used by Gandhi for the untouchables.”(Sethia, p.179)

These were the most disenfranchised of the Indian people and Gandhi took a stand to improve their social status. Anyone in his social caste would not have done this for fear of being shunned themselves.

In addition, Gandhi would only attend marriages if they were between different castes as he attempted to break down another social impediment between castes. In 1939 he was pictured nursing a leper patient in his efforts to address village hygiene and sanitation issues. His example led to those at his ashram being placed in villages, as their public service, to clean toilets for the untouchables. He modeled and led the way for others to practice selfless public service while sacrificing any personal gain or recognition. Gandhi had become the moral compass for his nation and the world through humility and forfeiture of his own life.

Non-Violence: Opposition to WWII and Quit India

In 1939 when World War II erupted, Gandhi opposed the war. Unlike his position of WWI, he stuck with his moral convictions and did not support the use of Indian troops. This was a further shift from his earlier view of himself as a British subject to the realization that service to the British government would not achieve his goal of independence and he would be condoning violence as well. In 1940 Gandhi was seventy one years old and his daily routine had long been established as prayer, spinning and more prayer in order to go into action on behalf of the “…poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him.”(Gandhi, p.311) This talisman became his spiritual and ethical guide for living not only for himself but for anyone who wanted to change. Gandhi was willing to practice what
he was preaching. By late 1942 he had developed a new plan to request that the British ‘Quit India’, trying to address it as the honorable way out for them. He clung to non-violence without harboring any hatred while the British authorities arrested him and other leaders of the Congress which sparked rebellions across India. These protests were crushed by the British in mid-1943. Even though this ahimsa campaign did not accomplish what he had hoped it would, he did not let the disappointment stop him. Gandhi did not accept defeat. Even at this stage of his life when most people are in retirement, he still had much more to offer his country and the world.

Disintegration of the Dream: Tragedy and Dissolution of the Union
After the Quit India campaign, Gandhi’s secretary who was also his translator for English died. As if this large personal loss was not enough to bear, the British blamed him for all the violence and disruption that had taken place across India. In response he went on a twenty-one day fast while incarcerated. Fasting would continue to be one of his most effective tools for combating violence. “…On February 22, 1944, Gandhi was struck by another tragic event: Kasturba passed away in jail after being seriously ill for several months.”(Sethia, p.136) She had been his strongest supporter to the end. Between 1940-1946, the British promoted an alliance with the Muslim League with promises of their own Muslim state. Gandhi was on the fringe of the negotiations because he opposed this plan. “…To many, in the aftermath of ‘decolonization’ partition was a reflection of a global trend of drawing artificial boundaries by colonial powers while exiting from their colonies.”(Sethia, p.143) Thus, this arbitrary division of India to create Pakistan would lead to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. Gandhi undertook the Calcutta fast to quell the violence between Hindus and Muslims and moved on to Delhi to fast as well in 1948. While there he heard of atrocities against Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan which saddened him even more. Due to the fragile condition of his health, Gandhi, weakened from fasting, had to be carried on a cot; but he refused to back down. His life was not his primary concern, but the unity of India was. Negotiations were going on that Hindus pledged to return homes and property of displaced Muslims wishing to return from Pakistan. Gandhi was satisfied with all the pledges of cooperation. Only at this point would he end his fasting. On January 29, he was writing his draft of the Constitution for the Indian National Congress the day before he was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu extremist whose view was that Gandhi’s inclusion of other religions in his prayer meetings was an affront and a threat to Hindus. Gandhi’s dream of a unified India had been shattered. The independence Gandhi had devoted his life to would come after his death which would be bittersweet. Prime Minister Nehru said,”…He died a martyr to the cause of unity to which he had always been devoted and for which he had worked unceasingly.”(Nehru, p.439). Gandhi had found his inner courage and voice to live up to his title of Mahatma, the great soul of India, by giving the ultimate sacrifice---his life for his country. This is why Gandhi continues to be a role model for the world.

Materials Needed:
World History text, if Gandhi is included in it
Power Point or Handout of Major events in Mohandas Gandhi’s life (Use content essay.)
Graphic Organizer to accompany power point or handout

Teaching Activities:
*Use text material to discuss whatever material is available about Mohandas Gandhi. (Use website “Mahatma Gandhi.” 2014. The Biography Channel website. http://www.biography.com/people/mahatma-gandhi-9305898.)

*Provide a handout of the points to cover for your students or create a power point based on the information in the content essay.

*Graphic Organizer: T-Chart format (Provide as a handout or have students divide their loose leaf paper into each of these sections=Teenager|public servant|non-violent leader l personal impact). Use this to discuss how Gandhi was a typical teen who did not always do the right thing, but still became a hero. Sample question: How did Gandhi evolve from a selfish person to serve humankind? What kind of sacrifices did he make? While reading/viewing the information on Gandhi, each student should fill in their own notes for the guiding questions listed earlier, using the graphic organizer headings.
*Oceanic Circles: Application=Starting with yourself in the center draw concentric circles and label in detail to illustrate your own evolution to how you can make a significant contribution to your own life and to your friends, family, community, nation and the world based on Gandhi’s philosophy of ahimsa, truth (satyagraha), selfless service to others for the good of humankind (sarvodaya). Give specific examples of the sacrifices you have made for others.*

*Compare and contrast activity: Use material from an educational Martin Luther King, Jr. website about the Civil Rights Movement and the non-violent strategies used. Assist your students to trace these actions back to Gandhi who was a mentor for Martin Luther King, Jr. Most websites also provide quotes from each of these men that you can use for discussion. Students can select a quote to explain or could make a poster with a quote from each man.*

Discussion Questions:
1. What were some nonviolent strategies that Gandhi used? Dr King used?
2. Where do you see Gandhi’s ahimsa influence in the Civil Rights Movement?
3. What qualities make a person a hero?
   Which of these qualities did Gandhi have? Dr King have?
4. How did Gandhi and Dr King make the ultimate sacrifice for their cause?

**Bibliography**


Sethia, Tara. “Gandhi on Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Trusteeship”. Summer Institute: Gandhi, Sustainability and Happiness. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. 31 July 2013.