Title of Lesson:
Chiune Sugihara, Living by Gandhian Principles

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
Language Arts, 6th grade

Class Size:
30 – 34

Time/ Duration of Lesson:
(20 - 30 minutes independent pre-reading of literature selection)
1st day - 80 minutes instruction
2nd day – 60 minutes – writing assignment

Objectives of Lesson:
• Students will read Chpts. 12 – 19 in A Special Fate, Chiune Sugihara: Hero of the Holocaust and critically discuss the situation in which Chiune Sugihara is faced with a difficult moral decision.
• Students will listen to five short excerpts from Gandhi’s life in which he was faced with making decisions regarding moral truth and action and will complete a thinking map detailing similarities between Gandhi’s experiences and C. Sugihara’s experiences.
• Students will consider material presented about Gandhi and write about someone they know or have read about that has made a decision or decisions to act morally per Gandhian principles. Responses will be evaluated by the instructor based on the references and correlation with Gandhian principles, specifically facets of passive resistance.

Lesson Abstract:
The lesson utilizes a biographical literature selection about Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat assigned to Lithuania in 1940. He defies his superiors by writing hundreds of exit visas for Polish Jewish refugees seeking to escape Nazi persecution. By his actions, he risks his own safety and that of his family; Sugihara conducts himself according to Gandhian principles of Soul-Force and satyagraha.

Lesson Content:
In his pursuit of truth, Gandhi engaged in numerous acts of civil disobedience. Five of these actions are briefly described below and can be explained to students to analyze and compare with the actions of Chiune Sugihara.

1) 1893, Gandhi sat in a first class compartment on the train when it was reserved for whites only and refused to leave it when told to do so.
2) 1914, Gandhi led efforts to repeal the Asiatic Registration Law (Black Act) which required all Indians to be fingerprinted and registered with the Transvaal Government
3) 1916, Gandhi investigated British mistreatment of indigo farmers in Champaran who were specifically protesting not being paid for their work
4) 1921, in Kotgarh, a village near the Himalayas, Gandhi organized a non-violent protest for the Untouchables who were seeking to be paid for their labor – this was eventually successful
5) 1948, Gandhi begins fasting unto death unless India pledges to stop the violence between Hindus and Muslims
Chiune Sugihara’s life and specifically a focus on his actions to save Jewish people from the Nazis are described in *A Special Fate: Chiune Sugihara, Hero of the Holocaust* by Alison Leslie Gold. Chiune Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat assigned to Kaunas, Lithuania in 1939. He and his wife and sons lived comfortably and with little tension until Jewish refugees began arriving in the town. They were coming from surrounding countries to escape persecution and Hitler’s army. As their possibility of being rounded up and killed or sent to concentration camps grew more certain each day, they pleaded with Sugihara to write visas for them to exit the country. His superiors repeatedly refused Sugihara’s direct but polite requests to grant permission for the visas. He struggled to make the decision to defy his superiors, subsequently risking his own safety and that of his family. But he chooses to secretly handwrite hundreds of visas for refugees to exit through Russia and then to Japan to escape the Nazis. Eventually, the Sugihara family ends up in Bucharest and barely escapes numerous bombings. When they can finally go back to Japan, Sugihara is disgraced by the Ministry and forced to resign his position. His family’s life changes greatly.

Before deciding to assist the refugees huddled outside the gates of his home, Sugihara called upon a committee of five men headed by a Pole named Zorach Warhaftig. Sugihara listened to the description of their plight. “The committee sat tensely in the consul’s office. One by one, the men spoke and Sugihara sat silently and gave them his complete attention.” After listening to each person’s “gruesome story of escape...he sat alone in his office…and remembered a Japanese proverb he’d learned in school. The proverb said: *Even a hunter cannot kill a bird that comes to him for refuge. What could he do?*” ¹ This sort of open dialogue with those involved in a conflict was important to Gandhi. When he decided to assist the indigo farmers in Champaran, Gandhi was “impressed by the tenant’s tenacity” and “Gandhi took pains to ascertain all the facts.” ² Sugihara was not immediately aware of the severity of the plight of the Jewish refugees and he originally had no intentions of disobeying his government, so, like Gandhi, he assessed the situation first. Furthermore, Sugihara considered the motivations of the refugees. One day he spotted a young man at his gate and said to himself, “Was he a spy? No. Was he dangerous? No. Was he a traitor? No.” ³ Gandhi also considered the motivations and character of those whom he sought to support and/or defend. “Stubborn though he may have been, Gandhi made a point of looking at both sides of issues. For example, even though he came to feel that British rule in India was not right for either the British or the Indians, he strongly defended what he felt to be the value of British Civilization wherever it appeared.” ⁴

After considering the plight of the Jewish refugees and deciding to seek help for them, Sugihara carefully prepared written telegrams to his superiors requesting permission to issue visas for the refugees; the text of his telegrams was polite and respectful. His request was not approved and he tried three more times, each time being civil and respectful in his approach. Though Sugihara was disappointed that his request to obtain safe passage for the refugees was denied, he did not respond with anger toward the government and his superiors. Instead, he responded like Gandhi and “a Gandhian is constrained to follow satyagraha regardless of the intentions of the opponent. Just because the opponent is uninterested in searching for a truthful resolution, this need not hinder the Gandhian from looking for one alone.” ⁵ Sugihara came to the conclusion that he must act alone and write visas for these refugees but that he would be like Gandhi who taught “A non-co-operator must remain respectful peaceful and humble towards all. The braver a man the more peace-loving he is, the bigger he is.” ⁶ Sugihara seemed to genuinely live this Gandhian principle and he was
much like Gandhi, who wrote “It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance, but I succeed on almost all occasions to keep my feelings under control…such a struggle leaves one stronger…the more I work at this law the more I feel the delight in my life, the delight in the scheme of the universe.”

Although Sugihara did eventually decide to write visas for the refugees, he considered over and over whether or not he was doing the right thing by defying orders and issuing the visas. “By acting against his own government, he would most likely lose all chance of advancement, ruin his career, and be disgraced. He might endanger [his family’s] life. He might have to disobey his government, but if he didn’t act, he would be disobeying God.”  In Gandhi’s Way, Mark Juergensmeyer states: “For Gandhi, moral reality was as certain as physical reality: there is truth in thought, truth in speech and truth in action.” Juergensmeyer also states that if you are someone concerned about doing the right thing even when you don’t have to, you are like Gandhi. You have internalized your moral standards; Sugihara did exactly that.

Finally, to make an additional comparison between Sugihara and Gandhi, Gandhi once expressed an understanding and connection to Jews. “My sympathies are with all the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became lifelong companions. Through these friends I came to learn much of their age-long persecution. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of untouchables by Hindus is very close. Religious sanction has been invoked in both cases for the justification of the inhuman treatment meted out to them…”

Refer to Appendix A for additional applicable quotes on moral behavior and civil disobedience and for Gandhi’s instruction for non-violent resistance.

Notes on Lesson Content:

1) A Special Fate, pp. 59 – 60
2) Gandhi, His Life and Message for the World, p. 56
3) A Special Fate, p. 67
4) Gandhi’s Way, p. 5
5) Gandhi’s Way, p. 34
6) Navajivan, Aug. 14, 1921
7) Young India, Oct. 1, 1931
8) A Special Fate, p. 68
9) Gandhi’s Way, p. 19
10) Harijan, Oct. 8, 1938

California State Content Standards- Grade Six
English/ Language Arts
• 3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character on…the resolution of the conflict.
• 3.3 Analyze the influence of the setting on the problem and its resolution.
• 2.3 Connect and clarify main ideas by identifying their relationships to other sources and related topics.
• 2.7 Make reasonable assertions about a text through accurate, supporting citations.

History/ Social Science
- 6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient India.
- Analysis Skills: Research, Evidence and Point of View, 1: Students frame questions that can be answered by historical study and research.

**Guiding Questions:**
- Did Chiune Sugihara make the correct morally-based decision by completing visas for the refugees? Might he have been more correct to obey his government’s orders?
- How do some people make difficult decisions that affect not only their lives, but the lives of other people?
- Might learning about some Gandhian principles for Satyagraha assist you in making difficult moral decisions that affect the lives of others?

**Materials Needed:**
- *A Special Fate, Chiune Sugihara: Hero of the Holocaust* one copy for teacher and copied excerpts for students, one per student
- Thinking Map, one per student (see Appendix B)
- Handout - Gandhi quotes, one per student (see Appendix A)
- Copy of assignment and rubric, one per student
- Selected excerpts from Gandhi’s life

**Lesson Context:**
This lesson could be used by teachers in 6th grade and connect to an analysis of varied literature based on the theme “courage”. 6th grade literature anthologies utilized in California and in other states contain various stories about people who display courage in varied circumstances. Many novels taught in 6th grade are also about people who act courageously. Sugihara certainly exhibited both moral and physical courage as did Gandhi. Gandhi said, “Courage is a commitment to move beyond fear.” In addition, instruction about Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha and Soul-Force in unarmed (passive) resistance can be discussed through excerpted stories from Gandhi’s life and actions. These excerpts support history standards covering instruction on important decisions made by important historical figures.

**Teaching Activities:**

**DAY ONE:**
1) Share overview of the complete biography of Chiune Sugihara and read aloud pp. 58 – 72.
2) Read excerpts from Gandhi’s life (see previous list) and describe to students.
3) Hand out selected quotes from Gandhi and his selected instructions for engaging in passive resistance. Appendix A
4) Whole class discussion of similarities and differences between Sugihara’s situation and decision and Gandhi’s situations and decisions
5) Students independently complete thinking map. These are collected for evaluation. Appendix B

**DAY TWO:**
1) Return students’ thinking maps. They can be used for reference for the assignment.
2) Hand out and briefly discuss the assignment.
3) Students write responses. Collect after 60 minutes.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
**Assignment**

Sometimes a person makes a serious decision not to obey a rule or guideline or to not go along with everyone else. Sugihara and Gandhi made such decisions. When they chose to disobey orders, they did so following Gandhi’s instructions for passive resistance. Sometimes a person is helped in making their own serious decision after an extended period of reflection and learning about difficulties or even tragedies faced by others outside that person’s realm of experience.

Describe in detail a decision made by you, by someone you know, or by someone you know through reading who has observed Gandhi’s principles for nonviolent resistance. (Appendix A) You should write at least two paragraphs covering: a description of the decision and how it opposed a rule or opposed others; references to Gandhi’s instructions for non-violent resistance and an explanation of how you or the person you are writing about followed those instructions.

This assignment will be evaluated using a 1 – 4 expository writing rubric. The rubric includes additional requirements for detailed explanation of application of Gandhian principles for non-violent resistance. Schools now use rubrics on a regular basis for evaluation of writing. If a teacher does not have access to a rubric appropriate for evaluating this expository writing, the teacher can go to www.rubistar.4teachers.org.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**

1) Although Gandhi taught that thorough non-violence is essential in resolving conflicts, not everyone would agree that in every situation a non-violent approach is best. Refer to the situation you already described in the original assignment. What would have been a decision for action that was not non-violent? Remember that violence is more that physically attacking someone. Explain in a detailed paragraph or paragraphs.

2) Refer to Gandhi’s instructions for non-violent resistance. What instructions might you add and in what specific situations? Provide details.

**Bibliography:**


Appendix A

“It was important to Gandhi that his nonviolent fighters be regarded as powerful. He abhorred the idea that satyagraha could be seen as a ‘cover for cowardice.’ He wanted it to be understood as something possible ‘only for the strong.’ By strength he meant the strength that comes through an indomitable will and a fearless resolve.”

Gandhi believed that “beyond all laws lies the ultimate law, the law of God, and one must respect it before one can even consider breaking the lesser ones. ‘No man should become a law unto himself,’ he cautioned.” Gandhi’s Way, by Mark Juergensmeyer

“Passive resistance…is the reverse of resistance by arms…for instance, the government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence, I force the government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed Body-Force. If I do not accept the law, and accept the penalty for the breach, I use Soul-Force. It involves sacrifice of self.” Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, Navajivan Publishing House, 1938

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.” One of the last notes left behind by Gandhi in 1948, expressing his deepest social thought.

These are selected instructions Gandhi wrote for what he thought was correct when engaging in non-violent resistance. Sugihara followed these instructions.

1) A satyagrahi, i.e. civil resister, will harbor no anger.
2) A satyagrahi will suffer the anger of the opponent.
3) A satyagrahi …will not submit, out of fear of punishment or the like…
4) When a person in authority seeks to resist a civil resister…he will not resist…
5) Non-retaliation excludes swearing and cursing.
6) A civil resister will never insult his opponent.