Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title: Conflict Resolution: We All Do Better When We All Do Better

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Grade: 8th, modification could make this possible for 6th-7th

Duration of Lessons: 4-5 days 50 minute sessions

Standards: American Council for Foreign Language Teachers Standards
- **Standard 1.1:** Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions
- **Standard 2.1:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied
- **Standard 5.1:** Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson is to guide students to see the values and power in nonviolent conflict resolution through the lens of the Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, and the farm workers movement. It then asks the students to make connections between values and their own actions. To push students thinking, it also begins to help students see the importance in helping the community and why communal uplift is something we are all are responsible for.

Guiding Questions:
- How can the teachings of Gandhi and Chavez help us to create a better school environment?
- Why is nonviolent conflict resolution a better alternative to violent conflict resolution?
- How does nonviolent conflict resolution increase our sense of connectedness?

Background Information:
Background Information: My students do not often see non-violent, positive role models in their history books, their communities or the state with whom they identify. This fellowship would allow me to better connect the students to history and how they see themselves in the world. When paired with the more commonly taught African American civil rights movement, the works of Cesar Chavez and Mohandas Gandhi can show students that many leaders from different countries and racial backgrounds have all fought for the same cause. This can help dissolve much of the racial tension among minority groups that exist in urban areas, and start to build relationships beyond traditional racial lines.

Content Essay:
Conflict arises naturally throughout communities as they change. Unresolved conflict can also create very polarized divides in which neither party can understand the perspective of the other. But when conflict is used effectively, it can create a better sense of understanding and renewed spirit to work together to accomplish goals. How a community deals with this issue will define if the community is able to evolve towards a better civilization or simply destroy it. The fragmented communities in schools in the United States are facing the challenges of conflict resolution. Both Gandhi and Cesar Chavez adopted non-traditional philosophies that created environments for a culture of peace that engaged and respected both sides of a conflict through humanity, compassion, and forgiveness.

To create a culture of peace one must look at how disagreements are handled between disputing parties. In many cases it is often “right and wrong”, “us” versus “them” approach. This
is what Gandhi (2009) would call a violent approach to conflict resolution. Violence exploits the parties into putting the idea of earning power ahead of truly resolving the conflict.

Two brothers quarrel; one of them repents and reawakens the love the was lying dormant in him; the two brothers begin to live in peace; nobody takes note of this. But, if the two brothers, through the intervention of solicitors or some other reason, take up arms or go to law- which is another form of the exhibition of brute force-their doings would be immediately noted in the press (p 88).

On the small scale nonviolent acts of conflict resolution are hardly noticed, but dramatic fights and harsh word quickly gain the attention of the masses. Although this quote was from long ago, it still applies the United States. We see this manifest through crowded school hallways where fights break out, partisan political battles, dramatic exchanges on reality television, and 24 hour news coverage of crime, murder and war. Gandhi states that hundreds of people live in peace, yet history only takes note when brute force and violence becomes the method of resolution. He provides alternatives to violence that uphold the humanity of both parties.

Gandhi’s alternative ideas for conflict resolution are echoed in many of the speeches that Cesar Chavez gave to the United States public during his time as a labor activist. “If we provide alternatives for our young people out of the way we use the energies and resources to our own lives, perhaps fewer and fewer of them will seek their manhood in affluence and war” (Chavez, 2008, p 121). Chavez understands that young people are taking note of what they have seen and heard, perhaps in history or in their own lives, and that violence is the method upon which they elevate their life status. Chavez also knew that the path to happiness and fulfillment cannot come from violence. The alternatives Gandhi and Chavez provide to conflict resolution are typically viewed as a sign of weakness in western cultures. However, through their philosophies, they show how fearlessness, compassion and forgiveness are not weaknesses but are essential for true nonviolent conflict resolution and repairing broken relationships.

For most westerners, showing fearlessness through compassion is contradictory to the ways in which our society displays fearlessness. Particularly the culture in the United States shows fearlessness through aggression, competition and violence in which the objective is to exploit the competition. Often times attempts are made to resolve conflict through aggression, intimidation, and fear. Gandhi speaks to using such brute force as an invalid methodology to reaching social change in India with the British Raj. “It is possible for us to do likewise, but by using similar means, we can get only the same thing that they got. You will admit that we do not want that” (Gandhi, 2009, p 78). The Raj used brute force, and the underlying principles of aggression, intimidation and fear to exploit India. Gandhi knew that using brute force to resolve conflict, exploitation occurs. This kind of conflict resolution creates an “us” versus “them” approach and creates an uneven power dynamic where both parties deny the other of their humanness.

To Gandhi, the humanity in nonviolence is much more fearless than using violence. Fearlessness is represented boldly in nonviolence through ones moral conscience to not partake in the very violence one has personally suffered. Gandhi used passive resistance (satyagraha) as a way to resolve conflict without violence. “The power of satyagraha also relies on the moral good of the oppressor and is aimed at igniting this moral good by transforming the opponent, thus acting as an ennobling force” (Sethia, p. 63). To Gandhi, the use of violence is not fearless because it devalues humanity. Violent resolutions only require enough violence to simply replaces one violent act with another, instead of creating lasting peace within a relationship or a community (Chavez, 2008). Instead, Gandhi and Chavez believed that true solutions cultivate themselves in compassion, forgiveness and love which by their very nature must be nonviolent. Soliciting and being compassionate and nonviolent requires one to be creative in how to resolve
conflict. It requires much more work than the taking up of arms or other violent methods, and as such is a much more difficult commitment.

The commitment to nonviolence is so great that it requires the discipline to remember the humanity of your opponent. Cesar Chavez understood the commitment to nonviolent conflict resolution throughout his life. His successful strikes and boycotts with the grape growers in California Chavez showed that it is a morally sound practice that requires people to think differently about how to truly embody nonviolence. In his Good Friday Letter to a powerful grape grower in California Chavez said “if to build our union required the deliberate taking of life, either the life of a grower or his child, or the life of a farm worker or his child, then I choose not to see the union built” (Chavez, 2008, p. 62). His commitment to compassion to others is seen through the value he places on human life-- even if that human life stands on the opposite side of the argument. This level of compassion prioritizes humanity over winning an argument. Unlike violent conflict resolution which seeks to dehumanize the other party, in nonviolent conflict resolution you are human first, my opposition second.

Seeing the humanity in your opponent allows you also to understand the necessity of forgiveness and compassion during nonviolent conflict resolution. Each side of a conflicted party must use these qualities to solve a conflict nonviolently. In the film *The Dhamma Brothers*, prisoners were able to work through emotional walls to ask for forgiveness and feel remorse for their own wrong doings through a practice called vippassana meditation. One prisoner who was serving jail time for murder was able to grant compassion towards a man who murdered his daughter. This is an example of where “In some instances nonviolence requires more militancy than violence” (Chavez, 2008, p. 64). It is normal to feel a sense of anger, frustration and aggression towards someone who has murdered a family member. The militancy of nonviolence is to seek compassion and to grant forgiveness. This is a difficult task that cannot be done with feelings of anger. Recognizing and respecting the humanity of others is an essential part of nonviolent conflict resolution. It serves two purposes. First it allows all parties to truly solve the problem and walk away respected. Second, it allows humans to see how their lives and actions are connected to the greater community.

The idea that the individual should be concerned with the whole community is one that Gandhi calls sarvodaya. The concept requires one to see another as him/herself. He saw nonviolent societies relied heavily on the work and respect of the individual so much that they see themselves as one being. Nonviolent societies would be:

an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the circles of the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of the villages, til at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral parts (p. 82).

Gandhi’s metaphor for how a society should be provides insight into the values he places on humanity. The circle represents the unity among all participants where no one party has more control or authority than the other. Because both parts of the circle show humanity, forgiveness and compassion they feel connected to the well being of the other. A motto of “we all do better when we all do better” show the deeply connected they become and it creates a sense of interdependence.

The goal of nonviolent conflict resolution in any community is to reach this sense of connectedness. It allows a deep mutual respect for both the individual and the larger circle as a whole. Because their is a mutual respect and sense of connection both parties will work together honestly to solve conflicts. Solving conflict will take precedence over any gain of power aggression or exploitation. This will not only deepen the sense of respect between disagreeing parties it will also strengthen the ability to work together efficiently advancing humanity. Unlike violent conflict resolution which creates distance and space between parties the more conflict that arises, nonviolent conflict resolution only strengthens the connection between parties.
Gandhi and Cesar Chavez wish to create environments where nonviolent conflict resolution is grounded in principles which seek to strengthen the human connection through compassion and forgiveness. Students do not often feel the strong sense of connection in schools which contributes to current environments of hate, greed and exclusion. The nonviolent alternative provides them a more complete way to resolve conflict which also increases their sense of human connection. By starting in the schools, we can create environments where nonviolent conflict resolution is not only the norm but valued highly because it creates a stronger community.

References:

Teaching Activities:

Terms to teach:

ahimsa: nonviolence

positive peace: not simply the absence of violence, but attributes that work towards a more cooperative, just community.

Negotiation: When conflicting parties come to a solution together.

Pesticides: Chemicals that kill plants or animals that damage a crop.

1. Have students decide on a list of things that are fair and unfair. See attached (I only have this on a hard copy. please email me for the list!)
2. Begin short discussion about WHY they thought these things were fair/unfair.
3. Discuss how our reactions reflect values.
   a. Record what students say.
4. As a class, discuss what values our class has in common, what the school has in common. Record these for later use.
6. Discuss connection between Chavez, Dr. MLK and Gandhi.
8. Write about Chavez’s reactions to the environment, violence, the growers, and how that represented his value of nonviolent conflict resolution.
9. Role play fair/unfair situations in school, and how one may react to them. (See attached for examples- Pages 7-8)
   a. In pairs, students create skits of conflicts that naturally arise in school and a good/bad example to how they could resolve them.
   b. Ask if they represent our personal values, our communities values. (From activity 4)
   c. Discuss how the solutions show examples of violence or nonviolence.
10. Do a close reading of these quotes from Gandhi and Chavez:
   a. if to build our union required the deliberate taking of life, either the life of a
      grower or his child, or the life of a farm worker or his child, then I choose not to
      see the union built. (Chavez)
   b. I am convinced that the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for
      others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. (Chavez)
   c. There isn’t enough money to organize poor people. There is never enough money
      to organize anyone. If you put it on the basis of money, you’re not going to
      succeed. So when we started our union, we knew we had to depend on something
      other than money. (Chavez)
   d. One drowning man will never save another. (Gandhi)
11. Ask students to reflect on these quotes as a group. Short discussion about how these
    reflect the history of Chavez, and if Chavez’s fight for social justice has been achieved.
12. Require the students to journal for 3 days all the acts of peace and violence they see.
    When they see an act of violence, provide an nonviolent alternative.
13. Discuss and ask students what power THEY have to change those things that were
    violent, and how they can “walk the talk” more often throughout their daily lives.
14. Create guidelines as a class for nonviolent conflict resolution. A “how to” with steps,
    sentence starters and specific times to resolve conflicts.

Resources:
http://www.tolerance.org/discourse