**Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute**

**Title of Lesson:** The Making of the Mahatma-: The Childhood of Mohandas K. Gandhi

**Lesson By:** Colleen H. Chan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size: 25-30</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3-4 but may be modified to fit grades 2 and 5 as well across the curriculum in ELA, SS, Word Study and in Read Aloud.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Seven to ten 45 minute periods (approximately a two week study)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guiding Questions:**
- What was Gandhi like when he was a child? Can you recall specific stories that showed courage or other character traits?
- How did Mohandas deal with tough problems when he was your age? What did he do? Who did he go to for help or understanding?
- How do you think Gandhi’s parents and family influenced him as he was growing up?
- What are some ways we can be more like Gandhi in our lives?
- What do you most admire about Mohandas Gandhi?
- How do your parents/ families influence you?

**Lesson Abstract:**

This lesson allows students to get to know the person Mohandas K. Gandhi, the man behind the leader. Children will be able to relate to Gandhi as they read and learn about him as a child and as he grows into an adult. They will study anecdotes about Gandhi and pay attention to the choices that Gandhi made based on his personal code of ethics even when he was a young child. Students will also make the connection that Gandhi was greatly influenced by his parents and his family. They will see that we are all shaped by the values we see modeled in our homes by our parents and families. Students will also learn that they can create a code of ethics to live by for themselves and make right-minded/ ahimsa decisions based on this personal code using Gandhi’s childhood and his life as an inspirational mentor.

**Lesson Content:**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869. He was the son of Karamchand and Putlibai Gandhi. He was born in India and lived in a town called Porbandar near the shores of the Arabian Sea. Porbandar was a town known for its houses built with white stones and was often called “The White City”.

The Gandhi family belonged to the Bania caste and although they were originally grocers, Mohandas’ grandfather and father both served as Prime Ministers (aka Dewans) in several Kathiawad States. His grandfather Uttamchand Gandhi aka Ota Gandhi was a man of principle. Ota was very loyal to Porbandar. He would not swear allegiance to any other town. Ota married twice. His first wife died and he remarried. Ota had four sons by his first wife and
two sons by his second wife.

Monhandas’ father, Karamchand aka Kaba Gandhi was the fifth brother in this family. Kaba served as Prime Minister in Porbandar and was a member of the Rajasthanik Court, which was a very influential organization that helped to settle conflicts between the chiefs and their clansmen. Kaba also served politically in Rajkot and Vankaner (Gandhi, p 3-4). A Prime Minister or a dewan took care of the everyday affairs of government. Kaba would appoint local officials, oversee tax laws, and collect taxes. He also represented the prince of Porbandar, acting as a diplomat in dealing with the British rulers. Kaba spoke English, Hindi and Urdu- all the main languages of India. His goal was to keep peace between the British and the people of Porbandar (Bains, p. 9). Gandhi’s family was well received by the community. Due to his father’s status, Gandhi and his family often received special treatment from the people in the community. The community considered Kaba to be a wise and fair man and the people often went to him for advice and help in resolving conflicts or problems.

Gandhi describes his father, Kaba, as a truthful, brave and generous man. He had no formal education and little religious instruction but he was very wise in political matters and in practical situations. Kaba did his religious duty and went to temple daily, however, Gandhi also claims that his father had a short temper and was enticed by carnal pleasures. It seems Gandhi drew this conclusion from the fact that his father kept on remarrying after each one of his wives had died and he married his last wife when he was over forty years old. Kaba was also known for his loyalty and incorruptibility. Hand in hand with those qualities, Kaba was not a materialistic man and accumulated neither wealth nor property for his family.

Like his father, Gandhi often linked himself with powerful and wealthy leaders in the community who were also politically involved. Mohandas used his English education and law school training to help many voiceless and faceless people both in South Africa and in India, twenty years later. Mohan probably felt at ease with men of high social and political status as he grew up in the prince’s court and received special treatment based on his father’s service to Porbandar.

Kaba married four times because each one of his wives had died. He had two daughters by his first and his second wife. Putlibai, Mohan’s mother, was Kaba’s last wife and she bore him a daughter and three sons, the youngest son being Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Gandhi’s mother, Putlibai was an extremely pious woman. She was incredibly self-disciplined and was described as a sweet and gentle woman who spoke kindly of others (Bains, p.15). Gandhi himself said that his outstanding impression of his mother was her saintliness and describes how Putlibai would not ever think of eating a meal without first saying her daily prayers. She visited the Vaishnava temple “Haveli” everyday and considered it her duty. According to Gandhi, she made many difficult vows and had no trouble keeping each vow. In fact, she often fasted and subsisted on only one meal a day, vowing not to have food until seeing the sun especially during the four-month monsoon season when fasts lasted much longer than one day. During the rainy season of Chaturmas, the sun would not be out often and certainly not everyday. Mohan and his brothers and sisters would run and tell her when the sun peeked its face out from behind the clouds but more often than not, Putlibai would rise too late and the sun would be gone again as quickly as it came. She cheerfully said, “That does not matter. God did not want me to eat today” and would quickly return to her obligations in the household (Gandhi, p.4-5). She never gave into her hunger.

The religious practice of fasting aimed to help its devotees to become adept at self-discipline and self-purification. Mohan was deeply impressed by his mother’s ability to follow
through with her vow and how she never betrayed the religious rules. This idea of fasting to
purify the body and to show self-discipline became a vital part of Mohan’s adult life. He often
fasted not only to purify himself but also to make a great political statement and influence his
people to abandon hate and fear and to pursue nonviolence instead. It is clear that Mohan was
forever changed by his mother’s example of dedication and self-discipline (Bains, p.18).

Putlibai had little formal education but had what Gandhi calls “strong commonsense”. She was well aware of political matters and the women of the prince’s court held her in high
regard and considered her to be very intelligent.

His family lovingly called Mohandas Gandhi “Mohan”. He was a baby who had lively
brown eyes and big ears, and he was adored and spoiled by everyone (Bains, p.8). Mohan and
his family lived in a three-story stone building with a small courtyard. There was a high wall
surrounding their home of many rooms. Mohan’s father, mother and brothers and sister lived on
the ground floor of the house. His uncles and their families lived in the other rooms of the
house. In the Hindu tradition, all six families would pool their income and make decisions
altogether about financial matters. It was important in Mohan’s culture for all members of the
family to be involved in making important decisions. For example, when Mohan was a young
man, he wanted to go to England to pursue a degree in law and become an attorney (aka barrister
in England) but he was not able to make that choice on his own. Mohan had to wait for all the
elders in his family to meet and consult with one another until many months had passed. The
family discussed the cost of Mohan’s’ education, his safety and how he would practice their
religion in England. Finally, the family decided that Mohan could go (Bains, p11-13).

As a child, Mohandas was greatly influenced but his mother Putlibai’s austerity. In
observing his mother, he came to the belief that a person who denies his or her own physical
needs increase the power of their mind and soul. He felt that this control gave a person special
strength over the world around them (Bains, p.18). Overall, Gandhi describes himself as a shy
and aloof child. He said that his schools books were his sole companions and that he often ran
home immediately after school because he could not bear to talk to anyone. He said that he was
fearful of being teased. Mohan also had difficulty leaning the multiplication table and recalls
little else from his early school days other than learning to call the teacher names from the other
boys at school. He was seven years old when his father left to go to Rajkot to join the
Rajasthanik Court. They moved to Rajkot and for the first time, Mohan experienced segregation.
He saw that the best sections of town were reserved for the British and that they had large, clean
houses with beautiful gardens. Indians were not allowed to live in any of these houses. Indian
wealth and status was no match for the power of the British. The Indians could only live in the
native town that was a congested, polluted and raucous place. The streets were muddy and
unpaved. There were no sewers or parks. It was nothing like their home in Porbandar. Gandhi
and his family were indignant that they were being treated as second-class citizens in their own
country by foreign British rule (Bains, p.23-24).

Throughout his school life, Gandhi never told a lie to his teachers or to his classmates.
In fact, in his autobiography, Gandhi recalled on particular incident in high school that shows the
depth of his character even at such a tender age. When he was a first year student in high school,
an educational inspector named Mr. Giles came to visit during a spelling lesson. Gandhi had
incorrectly spelled the word “kettle” and the teacher tried to get Gandhi to correct his spelling
error by copying from his neighbor’s slate. Gandhi refused to copy the work of his classmate
and was confused as to why this teacher was prompting him to “cheat” when he thought that
teachers were supposed to uphold moral standards in school. Furthermore, Gandhi reflected on
how he never lost respect for his teacher even though he disagreed with the teacher’s actions. He said that as a child he had been taught to “carry out the orders of elders, not to scan their actions” (Gandhi, p. 6-7).

Gandhi was not an avid reader as a student. He did not pour over books outside of his schoolbooks and lessons. He did however enjoy reading and viewing plays. He was enchanted by a play called *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka*. It is about a young man’s devotion to his blind parents. Gandhi felt that this character was an excellent role model for him. He also felt a deep connection with a play called *Harishchandra* and desired to emulate the title character’s courage in trials, honesty and sincerity. Gandhi so adored this character that he re-enacted the play in his mind over and over again. He was moved by the selflessness, courage and truthfulness of the characters in these plays and sought to emulate the same traits in his own life (Gandhi, p.7-8). The relevance of these plays and the idea of selfless filial piety return to inspire Gandhi later in life when his father becomes ill and Gandhi remains at his bedside nursing him night and day.

When Mohandas was thirteen years old, he was married in accordance with Hindu tradition. His family decided to have a triple wedding and one of his brothers was also wed alongside Gandhi and his child bride Kasterbai. He learned about lifelong faithfulness to one’s wife and about the duty of a husband. He admitted to being a jealous husband even though his young wife had not given him any reason to doubt her fidelity. As husband, he forbade young Kasterbai to go anywhere without his permission. As you can imagine, this caused bitter quarrels between the young couple. Gandhi realized it was unfair that he could come and go as he pleased and that she could not. He forbade her from seeing her friends and at times he even forbade her from going to temple without him! He reflected on the notion that he was trying to exercise his authority as a husband. He claimed that his severity was based in love and in his desire for her to live a pure life and for her to grow into the ideal wife, and in the end “to identify her life and thought” with his. He recalled being “passionately fond of her” (Gandhi, p. 13) and even called his love for her lustful at times. All in all, Gandhi concludes that child marriage is a cruel custom and that it is absurd to be married to someone who then must spend more than half her time at her father’s house during the first five years of marriage.

After Mohan was married, he continued to work on his studies in school and never brought home a “bad certificate” aka report card. He also mentioned winning prizes after passing the second standard level of schooling and winning a couple of scholarships. He recalled feeling surprised when he won a prize or a scholarship and it seems that he lacked confidence in his own academic abilities. He was however incredibly self-disciplined and quite a perfectionist. He said that “the least little blemish drew tears from my eyes… a rebuke, it was unbearable for me” (Gandhi, p15). Mohan continued to be shy and often refrained from participation in athletic activities as well. He was thin and short throughout high school (Bains, p.28) He did not see the value of gymnastics in education and admitted that in retrospect, he now recognizes that “physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training.” Thus, instead of participating in athletic activity in school, he had read in books about the benefits of taking long walks outside ad that is exactly what he did. Another reason that Gandhi did not want to participate in gymnastics was that he desired to go home and serve his father after school.

Mohan’s best friend was Sheikh Mehtab. He was good at sports and a brave boy. Mohan was small and afraid of many things including the dark. His family disliked Mehtab and thought that he was a bad influence on Gandhi but Gandhi did not heed their warnings. Mehtab was a Muslim and was allowed to eat meat in his religion whereas Mohan was a Hindu, a strong
Vaishnava (Gandhi, p.21) in particular and meat was restricted from his diet. Mehtab convinced Mohan that eating meat would make him stronger and manlier. Eventually, Mohan gave in and tried eating meat a couple of times but his guilt overwrought him and he made a vow never to eat meat again lest he disappoint his mother and his family and betray his faith (Bains, p32).

Another thing that bothered Mohan at Alfred High School was that all classes were taught in English. He felt that part of the reason why he did not accelerate academically as quickly as he would have liked was due to this fact. All his subjects were taught in English and when Gandhi became an adult he rallied against this injustice. He told people that Indians have a right to speak and learn in their own language in their own country and should not have another country’s language forced upon them because it made the Indian people feel inferior. He wanted his people to have a sense of pride in their own culture and history so that they would be strong enough to become a free and independent nation (Bains, p27).

**VOCABULARY:**
*** Some important terms that you should be familiar with are:

- **Yajna** = sacrifice requiring self purification and self-examination (Iyer, Truth and Nonviolence p.5)
- **Ahimsa** = the Sanskrit word for noninjury that includes seeking understanding and love; right-mindedness and right actions (Walz and Ritchie, p.215-216); a renunciation of all forms of coercion and compulsion
- **Himsa** = violence, deceit, injustice which all proceed from fear (Iyer, Truth and Nonviolence p.5)
- **Swaraj** = national self government (Sethia, Berkshire Encyclopedia p. 803); self rule (Walz and Ritchie p.214)
- **Sarvodaya** = universal welfare (Iyer, Non-Violent Resistance…p1); the principle of self-development through service to others (Walz and Ritchie, p.215)
- **Satyagraha** = “truth-force” aka the power of truth directed towards the promotion of social welfare that confronts injustice and hostility through an effective appeal to conscience; a policy for action and a stimulus for social reform (Iyer, Non-Violent Resistance…p1); justice to all (Walz and Ritchie, p. 215)
- **Dharma** = the path of duty; a progressive concern for the welfare of the world (Iyer, Truth and Nonviolence p.3)
- **Swadeshi** = a person’s ethical responsibility to the immediate local environment and community often captured by the famous phrase “think globally, act locally” (Walz and Ritchie, p.218-219)

**New York State Content Standards:**

**ELA Standard 3:** Students will listen, speak, read, and write for critical analysis and evaluation. As listeners and readers, students will analyze experiences, ideas, information, and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria.

**ELA Standard 4:** Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people. As readers and listeners, they will use the social communications of others to enrich their understanding of people and their
views.

**SS Standard 1E**: Students will recognize how traditions and practices were passed down from one generation to the next.

**SS Standard 5E**: Students will participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, or community issue or problem.

**Materials Needed:**
- Book- “Gandhi Peaceful Warrior” by Rae Bains
- Book- “Martin’s Big Words”
- Different colored construction paper cut into 2x5 inch strips to be made into chain links
- Book- “We Are Different- We Are the Same”
- Writing Choice paper
- Drawing paper 8 ½ X 11
- Word Wall
- Word Study notebooks
- Pens and pencils
- Markers, crayons, craypas
- Large chart paper with lines

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

Intro Activity: Read the book “Gandhi: Peaceful Warrior” over the course of a few days during read-aloud. Discuss each section with the children and model note-taking on chart paper. Explain that good note-takers write down main ideas and important details and dates when studying a person’s life. Record the important parts at the end of the read-aloud each day. Have the children volunteer to share the important parts in sequence as you record.

1a. Read the book “We Are Different-We Are the Same”. Discuss as a class how we have many similarities as individuals. We all need food and shelter, we all have families, we all want and need to be loved…etc Discuss how we are different, how we may eat different foods, speak different language and have different kinds of families (in our home) e.g. Step-brothers and sisters, grandparents. 1b.Group the children in pairs and have them interview each other. Have the children write a response summarizing 3 ways that they are the same and different as their partner.

2. Explain to the children that we are going to create a beautiful link of paper chains all around the classroom to show unity and kindness toward one another. The children will “catch each other being kind”. Every time one student sees another student being kind or caring, the first student will take a piece of chain-link construction paper and write the act of kindness, the child’s name and the date. At the end of each day, the teacher will add the paper to the chain until the chain completed and has filled the entire perimeter of the classroom.

3. Look up famous quotes by Gandhi such as “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind”. Select 8-12 quotes that you feel are most relevant to you and your students and their community. Discuss each one of these quotes as a whole class. Ask the children the meaning of the quote...
and try to have them give examples from their lives where this quote might ring true for them. Break the class up into groups of 2-3 students each and have each group create a symbolic illustration for a quote of their choice. When all the students have completed their illustrations and the quote has been printed on top of the illustration, bind the book and make copies for each student. “Martin’s Big Words” is a great mentor text to study alongside this project so that students will have an idea of what their class book will look like in the end.

4. Discuss the characteristics that embody nonviolence and the nonviolent way of life. Add important vocabulary to your word wall and discuss them during word work or word study lessons. Words that you should include are:

FREEDOM RESPECT DIVERSITY PATIENCE KINDNESS *COURAGE
*COMPASSION *TRUTH *TRUST *FEARLESSNESS *FORGIVENESS *SERVICE
*SELFLESSNESS *SELF-RESTRAINT

The * denotes that the word is also one of the characteristics that embody nonviolence.

The children may write the definitions in their word study notebooks and may also draw a picture or symbol next to each word to help them recall the definition. For ESL students or lower level readers, you may devise the symbol or simple picture and add them to your class word wall as well.

5. Students may now reflect on each of the characteristics that embody nonviolence. Each student may choose one or two of the characteristics of nonviolence and write a small moment story that reflects a time when they witnessed or acted in a way that showed this characteristic of nonviolence. They will include the 5 story elements and include specific details in their stories. After revision, editing, and publishing, students will proofread their pieces and then share at the publishing party at the end of the unit of study. This would also be a good time to incorporate a lesson on public speaking so that when students share in front of the class they remember to:

a) Speak loudly and clearly enunciating each word
b) Speak slowly
c) Look up from their paper to make eye-contact
d) Breathe 😊
e) Stand up straight and tall

6. The power of song or chanting in many religions and traditions around the world can help your students to better understand and connect with the concepts of Gandhian nonviolence. Here is a rap that you can teach the children for performance at the conclusion of the unit:

Ahimsa is nonviolence
The act of actively BE-ing defi-I-ant
Against the broken down authority
Infringing upon the minority
Stand –up
Sit-In
Do what you must to be like Gandhi or King
You can march, fast, or pray
Don’t just listen to what people say
You can employ the hind swaraj
Win over your oppressor
And face the barrage
YEAH!
Think globally
Act locally
Change your karma
By doin’ the dharma
Cuz an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind
You gotta kill them
By being kind.
Peace Out.

Rap Poem By: Colleen H. Chan

Bibliography:


