Ahimsa Center K-12 Institute Lesson Plan

Title: The Only Route To Lasting Change: Satyagraha and Ahimsa

Name, School Affiliation, Location:
Rachel Chodorow-Reich, Berkeley High School, Berkeley, Ca

Grade Level/Subject Area: 9th/10th grade World History, Academic Language Development, English Language Arts

Duration of Lesson: 2 weeks, 1 period/day

Relevant California State Standards:
Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills
Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View
1. Students distinguish valid arguments from fallacious arguments in historical interpretations.
4. Students construct and test hypotheses; collect, evaluate, and employ information from multiple primary and secondary sources; and apply it in oral and written presentations.

Advanced ELD Standards
Reading: Read and orally respond to stories and texts from content areas by restating facts and details to clarify ideas.
Writing: Develop a clear thesis and support it by using analogies, quotations, and facts appropriately. Write a multi-paragraph essay with consistent use of standard grammatical forms.

Lesson Abstract:
In this lesson students will learn about the concepts of satyagraha and ahimsa, and why they are so powerful. They will create an argument using quotes and the academic language needed to support a claim as they explore why these forces and methods are the only way to lasting social change.

Guiding Questions:
Why is satyagraha channeled through ahimsa the only effective method to make true lasting change for the well-being of all?
What are the implications of this for my life?

Content Essay:

There are many problems in the world today that hurt people and the earth. Students see and hear about these problems all the time, and, like many of us, want to know: how can there be change that ends oppression and violence for good? In 1910 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi wrote his seminal book, Hind Swaraj, to articulate his view on how to end the problems India faced under the British. In it, and throughout his life, he compellingly answered the question about how to achieve lasting change that results in the well-being of all (sarvodaya): Using the power of truth and love (satyagraha), and exercising this powerful force through nonviolence (ahimsa).

What Is Satyagraha?
Gandhi discovered through over fifty years of work against oppression what satyagraha is, how to find it, and why it was so important. Satyagraha literally translates to holding to the truth. Gandhi also used the terms “truth force”, “soul force” and “love force” to explain this force. A simple explanation of how to uncover this force inside is that one must “find out what is right,
and to act accordingly” (Gandhi 89). For Gandhi the force, which he called *satyagraha*, came from the truth of the soul: that all people, beings, and the whole earth are interconnected and one. Dr. Tara Sethia, author of *Gandhi: Pioneer of Nonviolent Social Change*, explains that “*satyagraha* works on the basis of the law of love,” (Sethia 64) meaning the fundamental human care and love for others. Wielding that fundamental truth can remind others of this truth, convincing them to stop violence against others. Gandhi uses the term *satyagraha* to refer to both the force itself and the practice of using the force- one uses *satyagraha* to commit *satyagraha*.

Dr. Sethia lays out Gandhi’s warrior code for a *satyagrahi* (practitioner of satyagraha), they must seek to live a life of truth, love, and integrity, be willing to sacrifice the self for the greater good, and be ready to endure suffering of the highest kind in the pursuit of truth. It is only when the *satyagrahi* is imbued with courage of love and is devoid of fear that the force of *satyagraha* is effective in combating social injustice of any magnitude. A *satyagrahi* refuses to compromise the principles of truth and nonviolence even in the face of punishment, persecution, and self-sacrifice. (Sethia 64)

For Gandhi *satyagraha* “is the only moral means of combating oppression and injustice and for securing rights” (Sethia 93), and, Dr. Sethia warns, will likely cause suffering for the *satyagrahi*. “When a law is unjust, a *satyagrahi* does not obey the law even at the risk of penalty, including losing life. ... Manmade laws, when in conflict with the higher law of truth, are not necessarily binding on a *satyagrahi*. No one can enslave such a *satyagrahi*. *Satyagraha*, therefore, is the weapon of the strong. It requires greater courage” (Sethia 94). Using soul force, love force, will not be easy, but it is powerful.

**What Is Nonviolence, and What Is It Not?**

Because *satyagraha* is based in love of all beings it follows that violence cannot be used against any being. Gandhi explains that truth force can only be exerted through nonviolence, using the Sanskrit, *ahimsa*. Although *ahimsa* does translate as nonviolence (*himsa* is violence) Gandhi saw nonviolence as made up of two major pieces that shows more clearly what it means: love for all of creation (humans, earth, etc), and the rejection of and refraining from violence (Sethia 91). This is not just the absence or opposite of violence, it is more. Gandhi points this out, explaining, “noncooperation with evil [is] as much a duty as cooperation with good” (Sethia 140). Nonviolence is not passive; it requires aggressive action towards love and away from violence.

Dr. Sethia further elucidates the multitude of differences between nonviolence and violence including the differing underlying assumptions about the world. A common perception of human nature spread about the world today is that humans are naturally violent. This ‘story’ also claims that there is a natural separation and division between people, between humans and nature, and even that there can be separation within oneself. Nonviolence on the other hand assumes that everyone and everything is interconnected. One, whole, integrated, indivisibility, and unity are words associated with this view of the world. To move toward nonviolence therefore infers moving toward integrity and wholeness within oneself, of thought and action (Sethia Lecture).

The goals of violence, Sethia argues, are also different from the goals of nonviolence. Violence aims to defeat, exploit, cause harm, and hurt. Nonviolence aims to change minds, heal wounded feelings, connect seemingly oppositional interests, and cultivate compassion and care both in oneself and in the person/s it is “aimed” against.

Sethia also differentiates how nonviolence and violence “happen”, and their respective relationships to social change. Nonviolence is an extremely conscious way of being that involves careful, mindful choices and individual responsibility. Violence, on the contrary, is often
institutional, with the decision coming from a system or structure, and often done in moments of suspended judgment and consciousness. In terms of social change, violence both contributes to and is predicated on inequality whereas nonviolence obliges individuals to challenge even thoughts of inequality and aims for equitable social transformation for all (Sethia Lecture).

**Why Is Satyagraha So Powerful?**

Gandhi describes the powerfulness of soul-force as “an all-sided sword… [that] blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood, it produces far-reaching results. It never rusts, and cannot be stolen. … The sword … does not require a scabbard.” (Gandhi 92). The adversary is converted without harm because the power of love, nonviolence, and truth are stronger forces than fear, hatred, and violence (Sethia 94).

This in part is true because “an arm striking the air will become disjointed” (Gandhi 54). Dialogue, negotiation, and compromise are the heart of satyagraha work, and noncooperation and civil disobedience when necessary (Sethia 94). Gandhi explains how two kinds of force can back up a petition for change. The first is violence, the second is noncooperation. He describes how the latter can work against the British in the Indian freedom struggle: “If you do not concede our demand, we will be no longer your petitioners. You can govern us only so long as we remain the governed; we shall no longer have any dealing with you.” [This] force … may be described as love-force, soul-force… This force is indestructible. … The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul” (Gandhi 83).

In addition, satyagraha is a potent method of change because it helps the person it is aimed against reclaim their dignity and humanity. "Violence undermines [the] essential dignity of human being[s]" and "makes humans relate on [the] basis of fear and suspicion", making "humans stoop to [the] level of 'brute' unwilling to evolve their humanity." People who operate at that level "are fighting external 'enemies' but not the 'enemy within'” (Sethia 5). Satyagraha fights that enemy within.

**Why Is Satyagraha As Practiced Through Ahimsa the Only Effective Method of Change?**

Although violence may appear swifter in shifting oppressive situations it does not lead to lasting change. Social justice is urgently needed, so doubt of the effectiveness of ahimsa arises because satyagraha practiced through ahimsa will not lead to immediate success in one’s goals every time it is used. Gandhi and other practitioners of nonviolence like Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King Jr, all worked their entire lifetimes with great successes and gains, but there will always be work to be done. Nevertheless, the only potential way to have lasting change is through ahimsa. This is because, as Dr. Sethia clarifies, despite misleading appearances to the contrary, violence comes from lack of control and power and therefore cannot bring real, lasting change. Conversely, nonviolence, because it depends on the voluntary transformation of individuals on a daily basis can bring real, lasting change. As Gandhi explains, “what is gained through fear is retained only while the fear lasts” (Gandhi 77). The people/group opposed cannot give in only under duration. There has to be a transformation of their hearts, and using one’s love force is the only way to achieve this.

For Gandhi, because of his love of all, there is no option besides nonviolence. However he also provides a practical analysis for why nonviolent means are necessary to bring about nonviolent ends. He uses an analogy to demonstrate the inherent connection between means and ends, “to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom” (Gandhi 79). Just as a cart will bring one to the bottom of the ocean, so violent means will bring about only violence. He

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1 Or, as Cesar Chavez’s mother, Juana Estrada Chavez would say, it is not best to fight back as a young man, “it’s best to turn the other cheek. God gave you senses like eyes and mind and tongue, and you can get out of anything. It takes two to fight, and one can’t do it alone” (Orosco 24).
illustrates this explicitly, “should the British leave in consequence of … murderous acts, who will rule in their place? The only answer is: the murderers” (Gandhi 76). Gandhi then uses another metaphor to emphasize the connection between means and ends: “If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch, I shall have to pay you for it; and, if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and, according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means. Will you still say that means do not matter?” (Gandhi 80).

Gandhi also notes that satyagraha for the well-being of all can only work when combined with swadeshi, which “literally means pertaining to one’s own country and symbolizes self-reliance” (Sethia 94). For Gandhi this meant relying on one’s own strength of mind, body, and soul. (Sethia 95). Working towards swadeshi is a necessary part of social change efforts because it is indispensable for psychological and material liberation. Psychologically, it empowers people to realize that they can take care of their needs. Materially, without swadeshi there cannot be lasting change because there will still be dependence on inherently oppressive systems. For example if the villages in India became free of British rule but were still dependent on British industries, and the people still wanted British clothing, they would be unable to live sustainably supporting themselves, thus keeping them within a cycle of poverty. Gandhi noted that if swadeshi was realized “satyagraha in the form of civil disobedience might not even be needed” (Sethia 98).

Examples of the Power of Satyagraha

There are many examples of the power of satyagraha to make change. Many people question the viability of nonviolence to create positive change because the history they have learned is mainly that of violence changes. Gandhi explains why this is the story most people know, claiming that nonviolence will not be in the history of kings and emperors because “you cannot expect silver-ore in a tin-mine” (Gandhi 87). He continues to explain that the “most unimpeachable evidence” that the force of truth or love is successful can be “found in the fact that, in spite of the wars of the world, it still lives on” (Gandhi 87). He points out,

Thousands, indeed tens of thousands, depend for their existence on a very active working of this force. Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of this force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not, and cannot, take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. Two brothers quarrel; one of them repents and reawakens the love that was lying dormant in him (Gujarati says: one of them practises satyagraha against the other but this is omitted in the English text); the two again begin to live in peace; nobody takes note of this. (Gandhi 88)

Gandhi continues to explain that if the two brothers brought in the law (which Gandhi also argues is a form of “brute force”), let alone arms, the neighbors, press, and possibly the history books would take note.

Gandhi’s own life is a testament to the power of soul-force for creating change. During his 21 years in South Africa and the remainder of his life in India he used his satyagraha on a daily basis, working with others to successfully unite fighting cousins, overturn discriminatory laws, create agreements between workers and management/owners, force Britain to leave India, and disrupt destructive cycles of Hindu-Muslim violence bring concessions between the
two factions after Partition. These examples prove the potential for success of soul force to help people realize the truth in themselves and thus change their minds. This took decades of Gandhi carefully building up respect and trust (Sethia 209), shrewdly choosing where to apply noncooperation and civil disobedience, and the arrests and deaths of thousands of people. During the Salt Satyagraha alone 90,000 people were arrested including every member of Congress (Sethia 160). Perhaps the most important result of the power of love-force was how many millions and billions of people both during Gandhi’s lifetime and since have discovered, realized, and strengthened their own soul-force, all of which is needed towards the long-term goal of sarvodaya, well-being for all.

How To Develop Satyagraha and Achieve Ahimsa

Individuals need to carefully nurture soul force for it to be effective. Gandhi uses a metaphor of a clay pot, saying, “A clay-pot would break through impact; if not with one stone, then with another. The way to save the pot is not to keep it away from the danger point, but to bake it so that no stone would break it. We have then to make our hearts of perfectly baked clay. Then we shall be steeled against all danger” (Gandhi 55). When coming from strongly “baked clay” one will have a much better ability to transform another. Gandhi clarifies that finding and strengthening one’s soul-force cannot be forced from the outside- it has to come from within. “...Swaraj [self-rule, in this case] has to be experienced by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Slaves ourselves, it would be a mere pretension to think of freeing others” (Gandhi 71). The choice to live nonviolently as a principle must be voluntary, and it will require extensive efforts, sacrifice, and time to maintain (Sethia, 154-5). Love of all “is rooted in self-purification, in acts of compassion and justice.” Nonviolence may require “self-suffering and self-control” (Sethia 92). This was proved by Gandhi’s own life and the training he did with the other active members of his campaigns. Gandhi spent one day each week in silence, meditated and prayed for hours each day, fasted to gain clarity of truth, and read constantly. “When he was at the farm\(^4\), Gandhi trained cadres in nonviolent resistance involving peaceful violation of unjust laws, mass courting of arrests, occasional hartal (suspension of all economic activity), and disciplined marches. Gandhi nurtured among the residents an indomitable will to fight repression without fear” (Sethia 58).

Ultimately, the responsibility for a nonviolent state is a “shared responsibility for the leaders” and for individual citizens. The state “has a duty to encourage and support nonviolence in all aspects of life: social, political, economic and spiritual. [And to]... strengthen organizations that promote peace and nonviolence” (Sethia 92-93). Individuals need to look into themselves and see what “violence and injustice they might be tacitly condoning or indirectly supporting in their daily lives.” Humans, Gandhi asserts, can deal with any suffering or difficulty this might entail.

The task each person must take on is to learn to love all, and the person who is “free from hatred [will then require] no sword” (Gandhi 97). The good news is that this all-powerful force of satyagraha is inside each of us and with dedicated efforts can grow stronger and stronger. Gandhi explains the patently worthy benefits of doing it and the results of not doing it: “When men become obstinate, it is a difficult thing. If I pull one way, my Moslem brother will pull another. If I put on a superior air, he will return the compliment. If I bow to him gently, he will do it much more so, and, if he does not, I shall not be considered to have done wrong in having bowed” (Gandhi, 53). After recognizing that all are divine and interconnected, the first step in cultivating soul force is to cultivate love of self, which will be concurrent with love of all. Developing and using this satyagraha is the only way to bring about nonviolence in the world.

\(^4\) The ‘farm’ meaning the intentional community—ashram—that he created.
Bibliography:


Teaching Activities:

Day 1: As a class brainstorm answers to the question, how do positive changes come in bad situations? Ask questions about individual and larger group/nation/world situations. Begin to make a list of academic language students can use to assert an opinion and practice using this language. Show digital story.

Day 2: Go over lists of key mortar vocabulary for supporting a proposition that students came up with and any additional sufficient (versus advanced or sophisticated) vocabulary. Explain the notion of a central question and thesis to drive an essay, and the notion of sub-questions to organize research and writing. Go over sub-questions for my essay (show question map). Read introduction section of essay and section on satyagraha. Ask students to identify how they know when a new topic is being introduced in the essay. Go over key concepts and brick (topic-specific) vocabulary as it comes up. Students begin to outline answers to sub-questions. Students take notes either (not sure which is better) using Says Means Matters or normal Talking to the Text (aka Cornell) notes. As a class we identify mortar vocabulary (proposition/support words, and describe/elaborate) and add them to our list in the appropriate columns of sufficient, advanced, or sophisticated (students pick which column it goes into).

Day 3-5: Continue through the rest of the essay using the same structure as on Day 2.

Day 6: I will go over my process for writing the essay, including how I pulled quotes, how I organized it, how and where was effective for me to work (swimming, meditating, talking to others, being around others, listening to music- different types at different times), how much support I sought and got, and so on. Then in groups students pull out key quotes that answer the sub-questions.

Day 7: Students then pick one of the below questions as their central question and come up with the sub-questions for it and their thesis. They then outline their own essay.

What is the only way to make true lasting change for the well-being of all? What is satyagraha? What is ahimsa? Why is satyagraha so powerful? Why is satyagraha channeled through ahimsa the only effective method? What are the implications of this for my life?

Day 8-10: Write and edit essays

Materials: *Digital Story: It’s Inside You*