Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson:
Actively Organizing Passive Resistance

Lesson By:
Kathryn Djouallah

Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
History/Social Studies
5th and 6th grades

Class Size:
Any size

Time/ Duration of Lesson:
3 to 5 lessons

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
• Students recognize unjust, oppressive authority and decide to not accept it.
• Students organize as a group, defining each class member’s role in opposing the authority figure.
• Students act against unfair authority in order to change the laws that they are required to follow. They do this in a non-violent way that is beneficial to both sides.
• Students understand the role of the media in passive resistance.

Lesson Abstract:
Students will participate in a simulation of life in a coal mining “patch” town in Pennsylvania in the late 1800s. Because the laborers suffered through difficult working conditions, they will organize to determine the best way to stand up for their rights using passive resistance. Each member of the group will determine his/her role in this process. They will use Gandhi’s idea of passive resistance, and also his methods, to determine and guide their actions.

Lesson Content:
Passive Resistance
Passive resistance is defined as resistance by nonviolent methods to a government, an occupying power, or specific laws, as refusing to comply, demonstrating in protest, or fasting. People often choose to break the law, and they expect to face the consequences. The actions are carried out non-violently. Another term for this idea is civil disobedience. People commit acts of passive resistance when they are being treated in a way that is unjust or oppressive.

Gandhi described it in this way: “Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. 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 obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.”

Gandhi recognized that someone practicing passive resistance would make sacrifices in the process of realizing his/her goal, such as going without food or being arrested and put in prison. He advocated for a different method, the use of soul-force or satyagraha. Satyagraha involves helping both sides to understand the truth of the opposing side. Then both sides can
work together to come to new understanding that benefits them both.

Gandhi used this powerful tool in his quest for home rule. His goal was to come to a mutual understanding with the person (usually a representative of the institution he was opposed to) with whom he was in conflict. Gandhi was very clear that it was important to remain in contact with that person so that you could continue to talk through the situation. Before planning an act of civil disobedience, Gandhi would inform the British leaders of his plans. He would talk with them directly before he took any action. He would also publish his plans, and his reasons for carrying them out, in the newspaper. In this way, everyone involved was kept informed of the situation.

At a time when it felt as if the Indians were not making any progress in their liberation, Gandhi organized the Salt March. The British were in control of manufacturing salt and made it illegal for the Indians to do so. They also charged a high tax on the salt. It was a perfect law for Gandhi to oppose, not only because it was unfair, but because it affected all Indians regardless of economic stature or religion. Gandhi had his newspapers publish articles on the situation.

Gandhi wrote to Lord Irwin, the British viceroy at that time, to tell him of his plans. He invited all Indians to join him in a two hundred forty mile march to the sea where they would make salt. Gandhi wanted to march for as long as possible so that the march got a lot of publicity and so that many people had the opportunity to join him. He wanted to be arrested, but not until he arrived at the sea. He knew that if he was arrested, all Indians would rise up against the British. He also knew that if he was not arrested, the British would lose their power. Gandhi also asked all of the Indians that worked for the British to resign from their jobs. He reinforced the importance of nonviolence in all of his speeches.

Thousands of Indians joined Gandhi in his march to the sea. He was the oldest at sixty years. On the twenty-fourth day they arrived at the sea. By that time twelve thousand people accompanied him. Gandhi picked up a handful of salt as a symbolic gesture to break the law. He hoped to be arrested so that the newspapers would publicize his actions. Thousands more sprang into action and marched to the shore to support Gandhi. Indians began to gather and process their own salt.

Gandhi was a genius at mobilizing the Indian people. This act of civil disobedience undermined the government authority and embarrassed the leaders. He was not arrested up to this point, so he decided to raid the Darasana salt works. Finally the authorities put him in jail. To protest Gandhi’s arrest, the Indian citizens stopped working, creating chaos throughout the country. Thousands of people were put in jail and it was a matter of pride for a family to have a member arrested.

The raid on the salt works continued, led by Sarojini Naidu. She was a poet and a supporter of Gandhi. Twenty-five hundred demonstrators confronted the guards. They peacefully marched up to the gate, and the guards beat down the first row of men. The protesters did not retaliate and remained nonviolent throughout the entire episode. Line after line of marchers approached the gate and was beaten down. The women helped to remove the
injured and they cared for their wounds. Even knowing that they would face violence, the courageous men kept marching for their cause and did not lose their dignity.

The British government lost control of India through the Salt March. Although it took sixteen more years for Indian to gain its independence, Gandhi had convinced the majority of the people to practice civil disobedience. This was a turning point for the country.

Passive resistance was one part of Gandhi’s satyagraha. Gandhi called his way of resolving conflicts satyagraha, grasping onto principles, truth-force, or love-force. He assumed that behind every struggle lies a deeper one. Two people have views that are true, but the people involved cannot see that they both want the same truth. Gandhi’s way of resolving conflicts through satyagraha is to have both sides discuss the issue until they can come to a resolution with which they are both happy. This often means seeking a solution to a problem that neither side thought of at first. It can also take time, and patience is required for practicing satyagraha. Through talking and thinking about the issue, people can come up with a common truth that is satisfactory and respectful to both parties.

Gandhi developed his idea of satyagraha while he was living in South Africa. It was during this time that Gandhi first experienced racial discrimination, and through prayer, careful thought, and action he became a champion of the rights of the Indians living there.

Gandhi first tested his ideas when, by implementing the 1907 Asiatic Registration Act, the government required all Indian men, women, and children above the age of eight to submit to official registration and fingerprinting. If they did not comply they would be fined, put in prison, or deported from the province. Indians would also face these consequences if they were found without a certificate of registration.

Gandhi did not register and was imprisoned as a result. During this time he stayed in constant negotiation with the South African government. Gandhi looked for compromises and continued to do so even when the government did not follow through on the agreements they made. Over time the government continued to impose restrictions on the Indian population. Indians were not allowed to travel freely through South Africa, and at one point only Christian marriages were declared to be legal. Gandhi and his followers worked hard throughout this time to fight for their rights in a way that was non-violent, and with awareness of the struggles of the South African government.

In 1914 the Indian Relief Bill was passed. It was a compromise between the South African government and the Indians that was fair to both parties. Gandhi then returned to India to work for Indian rights in his home country.

One hundred years after Gandhi’s first test of satyagraha, we can still learn much from his methods and philosophy.

State Content Standards:

PA State Academic Standards for Civics and Government 5.1.6 Grade 6
B.Explain the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the
common good in the community, state, nation and world.

C. Describe the principles and ideals shaping government.
- Equality
- Majority rule/Minority rights
- Popular sovereignty
- Privacy
- Checks and balances
- Separation of powers

PA State Academic Standards for History 8.2 Grade 6

D. Identify and explain conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations in Pennsylvania history from Beginnings to 1824
- Labor Relations (e.g., indentured servants, working conditions)
- Ethnic and Racial relations
- Immigration

Guiding Questions:
- What are my responsibilities when a person in authority is disrespecting my rights?
- How can I stand up for my rights in a way that is respectful of everyone involved?
- What are the preconditions and tools that I need for passive resistance?
- What can I do if laws or rules are unfair?

Materials Needed:
- Writing materials
- Documentary: Salt March (from A Force More Powerful documentary series)

Lesson Context:
The students will be participating in a simulation. Each child will have a role as a member of the community in a patch town. Working conditions are terrible and there is a big divide between the wealthy mine owner and the laborers. The digital story portrays some of the difficulties faced by the laborers. Students will receive “payment” for the research work they complete in a day. They must buy all of their goods at the company store. Payment will be unfairly distributed, with some members earning more than others. The mine boss will randomly withhold pay for work that has been completed. The members of the community will meet to discuss their concerns and organize themselves to stand up for their rights. They will need to think about strategies to communicate with the mine boss. They could also organize a strike if conditions do not improve.

Teaching Activities:
Through teacher input and discussion the students will become familiar with Gandhi’s approach to passive resistance.
The students will watch a documentary about the Salt March.
The students will write about passive resistance and civil disobedience in order to clarify their understanding of Gandhi’s interpretation of these terms.
The students will meet as a patch town community and organize their group by choosing a leader and determining a role for every member of the community to oppose the unfair practices of the mine boss.
Students will determine what actions are appropriate to stand up for their rights while respecting the rights of the mine boss. They will write an action plan. Students will carry out their action plan, revising and repeating the last two steps as necessary, until the issue is resolved.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
Students will write their understanding of Gandhi’s thoughts on passive resistance and civil disobedience.
Students fill out reflection forms at the end of each lesson to record what work they accomplished during that session and where they need to start for the next session. They also reflect on what they did that was effective and what they need to do to improve.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**
Students can ask family members about passive resistance and civil disobedience. Anyone who has personal experiences to share will be welcome to come in and talk with the class.

**Bibliography:**


**Resources for Teachers:**


**Resource to show students:**