Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title: Teaching Children Nonviolence through Children’s Literature

Name, School Affiliation, Location:
Charlotte Donkersgoed, Danube Elementary, Granada Hills

Grade level/Subject Area: Kindergarten/English Language Arts, History

Duration of Lesson 2-30 minute parts

Related Standards:
California Language Arts Standards: 2.0 Reading Comprehension-Students identify the basic facts and ideas in what they have read, heard, or viewed.
2.3 Connect to life experiences the information and events in texts.

California History K.1 Students understand that being a good citizen involves acting in certain ways.
K.1 (2) Learn examples of honesty, courage, determination, individual responsibility...

Lesson Abstract: Students will understand that they can demonstrate courage in helping others who are treated badly. They will demonstrate what non-violence and violence are separately. We will read and discuss “The Buddha and the Terrorist” through a similar adaptation in children’s literature, “Mean Jean the Recess Queen”. Both stories share a theme of an outcast who has been befriended by someone. This person who befriends them is feared by the others within the story because this individual has been known to be violent and unapproachable. Since these are kindergarten students, I have adopted the children’s story in order to share a relatable theme of non-violence.

Guiding Questions: What does it mean to be nonviolent? How do we solve problems in a nonviolent manner? How do people feel when they are treated badly? How can we be a good friend to others and help to make them feel included in our school community?

Content Essay:

It has been said that an ounce of kindness is worth a pound of cure and so it is with people who are nonviolent in their behavior. It allows them to open doorways for those individuals who need a way back from isolation, anger and fear. We will review what it means to be nonviolent as a class. Some possible answers from students include: sharing with others, smiling at someone, helping someone who has fallen or dropped something, or helping someone who is new to our school. As we do this it will allow the student to consider what a peaceful, kind person is not. The story of The Buddha and the Terrorist (Kumar) relates a story of how a young man is ostracized by his village because of difficulties with his parents. He becomes isolated and angry and that anger fuels more and more violence. He is known by name, Angulima, for the crimes he has committed and meets each victim with the anger and violence that is expected. The story is one of continued violence until Buddha comes to meet this man and offer him friendship and understanding. He believes in Angulimala and allows him to
overcome his behavior and realize a much more powerful position of nonviolence. Angulimala comes to learn that he can be more powerful through his words and kind actions than through his sword. Gandhi believed that, “...true civilization is one that elevated ethical and spiritual qualities among humans and leads them to “good conduct.”” (Sethia)

In the course of wanting to relate this text to my students it was difficult to find a way to relate this story to young students. I came across a book that related the same story in a manner that was kindergarten friendly. In the book, “The Recess Queen” (O'Neill) a little girl moves into the community and begins to attend the neighborhood school. She was without fear as she entered the playground. She did not fear the one student who everyone seemed to fear in the school, Mean Jean. Jean got her label of Mean Jean since she was in control of the playground and no one was allowed to do anything without her permission. Mean Jean is better than anyone at any sport and she is the playground bully. If she is crossed she will administer punishment with physical force. All students feared her and complied with her wishes. That is until Kate moved in and went out to play on the playground. She had not fear and proceeded to ignore the promptings of others to stop playing with the equipment or else Jean would be angry and she would be in serious trouble. She continued to play and asked Jean to be her friend and to play with the equipment together. Jean is surprised by Kate’s lack of fear and also so happy to know that someone had actually wanted to befriend her. She really wanted to have a friend and accepted Kate’s offer. This friendship offered Jean a new outlook on life and she began to lose her hard, cruel exterior. She now had a friend and she felt a sense of worth and peace.

Kate is fun-loving and happy and seems to espouse the nonviolent nature that Gandhi spoke of in his work. Gandhi was an example of this as he felt that people need to be in control of themselves and then had the responsibility to serve others. “Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions.” (Parel) This sense of community is necessary to our own betterment and our survival. He was an example of service and kindness to others.

Kate encounters Mean Jean and is unafraid of her anger just as Buddha was fearless of the wrath of Angulimala. Gandhi taught that we need to get beyond fear and love the person. In both The Buddha and the Terrorist and The Recess Queen an example of what change can happen when a person rises above the idea of selfishness and loves others as themselves.

We can all know the kind of peace that comes from nonviolent behavior through education and practice. We will look at examples of how people have reached out to them personally and how it made them feel to have a friend and to be helped in a time when they needed it. We will then discuss the theme and consider how we can relate to others in a nonviolent manner. As we discuss we will create a visual representation of these thoughts on a circle map with the word nonviolence in a center circle and a larger surrounding circle some distance from the center circle. I will then place ideas that are shared inside this larger circle. It has been made clear to me that relating what nonviolence is then creates a way in which to better understand what peace includes. We will then take the story characters and create a visual representation of who each of the characters are including their physical qualities and their personality type as well. Were they happy or sad? Were they violent or nonviolent? How did their personality affect those people around them? Did they help others to feel happy or sad? Is it ok to have a bad day or to feel angry and how do we treat others when we are not happy?

Elementary students and adults alike can learn from this story and change the way we look at people as friends and enemies. We are only going to overcome violence through positive
change in our schools and our communities at large. The one way to incorporate this ideology is through education of young students who can internalize this idea and then take this information to their families. They can show their families and friends a higher level of love and understanding that can create real change in our communities. As Gandhi states, “It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves.” (Parel) He relates our personal, moral responsibility to be the change we need and want to see in others.

Bibliography


Teaching Activities:
We will begin with a discussion of what nonviolence is and what it is not through visual presentation on a circle map. Each map will list what nonviolence is and then give a better understanding of what violence includes. Some possible student responses include: Nonviolence is happiness, kindness to others, helping others, being a friend, saying I am sorry when you hurt someone.

After this discussion we will read the book, The Recess Queen and discuss what happened in the story in the beginning, middle and end. We will discuss what the problem is and how it was solved through nonviolence.

Students will demonstrate their understanding of what nonviolence is by role play and acting out situations that they may encounter and how they can resolve issues through a positive approach. Possible role play ideas may include acting out the following: helping someone who has dropped their books, asking someone to play on your team, smiling at someone and saying hello to a person who is new to the school.

Material: The Buddha and the Terrorist (to be read by the teacher previously), The Recess Queen, chart paper and markers or a dry erase board and markers.