Ahimsa Center K-12 Institute Lesson Plan

**Topic:** Swaraj through Personal Narrative

**Name, School Affiliation, Location:** Andrew Duden, Lake Oswego High School, Lake Oswego, Oregon

**Grade Level/Subject Area:** 9th Grade/World History

**Duration of Lesson:** 4 90-minute block class periods (approximately 5-6 days in a 50 minute class)

**Relevant Oregon State Standards:**
SS.HS.HS.04 Understand how contemporary perspectives affect historical interpretation.

SS.HS.HS.05.04 Understand how European colonizers interacted with indigenous populations of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, and how the native populations responded.

SS.HS.CG.06.02 Understand the causes, course, and impact of the civil rights/equal rights movements.

**Guiding Questions:**

- How can students use personal narrative to achieve Gandhi’s model of swaraj (self rule)?
- How can students and teachers collaboratively use methods of Dr. Jose Calderon’s participatory research methods as a means to building stronger community within a classroom?
- How can Gandhi and Calderon assist students’ ability to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of history to gain truth?

**Lesson Abstract:**
Students read passages from Dr. Tara Sethia’s Gandhi: Pioneer of Nonviolent Social Change, Chavez eulogy to his mother Juana Estrada Chavez, as well as passages from Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj to gain a deeper understanding of Gandhi’s swaraj (self-rule). Then, using Jose Calderon’s pedagogy of participatory research, students share personal narratives of historical moments in their lives where they learned valuable lessons that brought them closer to truth and their own swaraj.

**Lesson:**
This essay provides an understanding of how students use personal narrative to achieve Mohandas Gandhi’s model of swaraj (self-rule) as well as foster within the classroom compassion and humanization among students. Typically,
when we think of self-rule in relation to Gandhi, we think of the movement of Indian independence from the British. However, for the purposes of this essay, we will consider a deeper context for swaraj. Literally, swaraj for Gandhi meant rule of the self. In other words, through the praxis of self-discipline and self-transcendence, one can achieve self-rule. For Gandhi, “To have complete swaraj the citizen would need the enjoyment of spiritual swaraj – inward freedom – achieved through spiritual transformation.” (Gandhi, xix) In order to prepare students for their swaraj narratives, teachers use three separate sources: Dr. Tara Sethia’s first chapter “Formative Years” in her biography titled Gandhi: Pioneer of Non-violent Social Change, Cesar Chavez’s eulogy to his mother Juana Estrada Chavez, and Gandhi’s own Hind Swaraj (with editorial comments by Anthony J. Parel). Chavez’s eulogy to his mother, Juana Estrada Chavez, demonstrates how his mother provided him lessons in Mexican folk culture that developed his sense of truth in nonviolence. Hind Swaraj demonstrates how Gandhi employs a dialectic method of writing, and how this internal dialogue models swaraj. The first two sources allow students to see how even childhood stories are valid sources for understanding how we learn life lessons. Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj allows students to see Gandhi’s own internal struggle with difficult subject matter, and Gandhi’s ability to derive truth from that internal struggle.

The next part of the essay considers how the method of dialogical encounters through personal narrative creates mutual learning and a compassionate classroom. Finally, Gandhi’s swaraj and Calderon’s pedagogy when synthesized demonstrate how teachers and students can achieve this essential question: How can Gandhi and Calderon assist students’ ability to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of history to gain truth?

The Use of Gandhi and Chavez as a Motivator for Personal Narrative Topics:

Sethia provides us examples of Gandhi’s life experiences in childhood; moreover, she explains how life experiences developed Gandhi’s sense of truth. Gandhi’s early life lessons demystify him; he who might appear otherwise as a saint becomes more human. In the first chapter of Sethia’s biography, titled “Formative Years,” she provides numerous examples of lessons that led Gandhi’s swaraj: fasting, religious pluralism, vegetarianism, courage and most importantly, a commitment to truth. As Gandhi matures, his quest and commitment for truth becomes more sophisticated, but these early lessons cannot be undermined. Moreover, Chavez’s eulogy to his mother provided numerous examples of how folk culture taught by his mother show him critical lessons in non-violence and service to others. His impoverished mother fed the homeless, provided naturopathic health care, and worked in the fields to support the family. By looking at these narratives of Gandhi and Chavez, students understand how their own life history can provide meaningful lessons to their understanding of truth. Students learn that even early life lessons are valid. Hopefully, the readings will empower my students

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to identify a story in their own young life that brought them closer to the truth. 

**How Hind Swaraj models internal dialogue and arrival at truth:**

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi used internal dialogue as well as self-criticism to gain truth. The whole of *Hind Swaraj* is written as a dialogue between a “Reader” and a newspaper “Editor.” Gandhi chose a dialogue, rather than an exposition, for numerous reasons. First, according to Parel, “The Reader is “a composite” of different Indians from differing political positions on the issue of Indian self-rule. Also, this form of writing in dialogue readily lent itself to Gujarati, Gandhi’s native language. Most importantly, it was considered ‘the best method of treating difficult subjects’” (lxiii).

Clearly, Gandhi was on a journey of internal discovery to determine what is true about difficult subjects related to humanity. So, the organization of the writing itself as a dialogue works beautifully to illustrate the process of self-rule. Gandhi achieved moral transformation through the process of self-reflection (Parel, xix). By using two voices, rather than one, Gandhi provided insight into what he believes to be true and not true. It was his struggle. In Gandhi’s chapter on “Brute Force,” he at one point wrote, “Will you admit that you are arguing against yourself” (78)?

Gandhi also demonstrated the necessity to unlearn falsehoods in the human condition. He wrote, “Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes” (79). Again, we must remember that Gandhi spoke directly to himself although he employs the pronoun “you.” Rather than being coercive towards another, Gandhi directed his arguments at himself. Then, he continued by elaborating on what he believes to be the truth:

“The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree: and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree” (79).

Through internal dialogue, Gandhi arrived at truth. In what may be Gandhi’s most powerful moments in *Hind Swaraj*, the writings on brute force and passive resistance, Gandhi painstakingly considered every possible scenario in which an action is moral or immoral. Gandhi employed language like “we shall take the example...let us proceed a little further...let us examine the other” (80-81). Gandhi exhausted all possible ideas until he arrived at the truth. He concludes, “The poet Tulsidas has said ‘Of religion, pity or love is the root, as egotism of the body. Therefore, we should not abandon pity so long as we are alive.’ This appears to me to be a scientific truth” (87). When Gandhi says “scientific truth” he means *shasta wachen*; “scientific truth according to the science of morals.” (87) Thus, Gandhi has gained a deep understanding of what is moral through this internal dialogue. As well, in terms of his method, moral truth arrived for Gandhi through deep introspection, and a consideration of the thoughts and ideas of his adversary. In his conclusion, he proclaimed, “Those [civilizations] only can be considered to be so imbued, who having experienced the force of the soul within themselves, will not cower before brute force, and will not, on any account, desire the use of force” (114). In both his content and method, Gandhi modeled that “humans are morally fragile beings, requiring constant self-correction” (Parel, xix).
To conclude, if students are allowed to read brief, important passages of Hind Swaraj, the teacher can illustrate how internal dialogue, and critical self-reflection, are an essential tool for personal narrative. Through internal dialogue, and self-criticism, one is better able to achieve truth.

**Why sharing our personal narrative with each other is critical according to Jose Calderon and Pablo Freire:**

The value of an internal dialogue, and the ability to recognize our moral fragility as a mechanism for the discovery of truth, lies at the heart of swaraj. Once teacher and student have gone on this journey in their own narrative, it is essential that the class shares their stories with each other in an open, and wholly incusive, way.

Jose Calderon, a Professor of Sociology and Chico/a Studies at Pitzer College in California adds to our understanding of how personal narrative can be used by students and teachers to gain a deeper understanding of truth. Calderon rejects a top-down model of instruction where the teacher acts as a sage on a stage, and students are empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge. Rather, continuously, the objective is that student and teacher strive to learn from each other. The teacher provides “time for students to learn about the professor’s life and for the professor to conversely learn about the lives of students” (Calderon, 6). This is what Calderon calls participatory research. Perspective taking and participatory research then facilitates “critical dialogue on the possibilities for new models of democratic engagement and collaboration” (Calderon, 6).

The pedagogy of Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School influences Calderon’s pedagogy. Calderon believes in creating an environment of “mutual learning” like the one created at Horton’s Highlander Folk School. At Highlander, staff and students “could and did learn from each other, each respecting the individual character of the other” (Calderon, 6). In this educational environment, learning occurs that accomplish two goals: first, truth can be more readily discovered; second, compassion is developed among teacher, students, and community members.

Calderon’s pedagogy also is rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educational philosopher most known for his work with illiterate campesinos in Brazil. What Calderon terms “participatory research,” Freire referred to as a *dialogical encounter*. Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, maintains that dialogue between teacher and student is fundamental to the liberation of the student. He writes:

“Dialogue is...an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants....It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another.” (70)

Much can gained from this single quote from Freire. First, as Calderon maintains, the relationship between teacher and student must be approached as equals, or what he describes as a “united reflection and action.” Second, Freire maintains
that if dialogue succeeds as an "act of creation" then the world will be transformed and humanized. Freire adds, “Dialogue...requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human. Faith in people is an a priori requirement for dialogue.” (71) Thus, the sharing among teacher and students intensifies the ability to see oneself in the other; rather than maintaining traditional social hegemony (male v. female, adult v. child, teacher v. student, black v. white, gay v. straight, rich v. poor, etc.).

Gandhi, Calderon, and Freire synthesized:

The challenge remains to combine the practice of swaraj and the pedagogy of dialogue. In World History, when students write personal narratives, they identify moments in their life where they learn the truth. Moreover, their personal narrative should demonstrate an understanding of how that truth was derived from an understanding of falsehood. The teacher’s prompt for this type of narrative takes the following form:

“Think of a time in your life where you made a mistake. Describe that moment in your life in detail. Consider the setting, the characters involved, the conflict, and how the conflict was resolved. Finally, in your personal narrative, explain what the lesson was that you learned. Also, describe what you had to unlearn. In other words, what untruth caused you to make that mistake? How did that lesson bring you closer to the truth, and improve you as a person?”

In so doing, students involve themselves in an exercise if swaraj. According to Gandhi, one must not need to know all truths to adhere to the Truth. One needs merely to follow their own truth as little or partial it may be (Iyer, 5). Students must be able to share these narratives with each other as well as with the teacher. The teacher provides students his/her own personal narrative as well. Moreover, once the students complete their personal narratives, those narratives must be shared among groups. As the steps to the lesson below indicate, this sharing should involve students critically responding to each others’ work, and reflective discussion on the value of the entire exercise. As a result, the class achieves a community of mutual learning and compassion.

Bibliography:


Steps to the lesson:

Day One:

- Digital Story: *What do you know is true?*
- Reading in class: Chapter 1, “Formative Years,” *Gandhi: Pioneer of Non-violent Social Change*, by Tara Sethia and Chavez eulogy to his mother.
- Small group discussion of formative lessons learned in youth by Gandhi and Chavez with "Lessons Learned" worksheet and debrief.
- HW: Our History Brainstorm Assignment

Day Two:

- Partner peer share debrief: Our History Brainstorm Assignment
- Reading in class: Chapter XVI, “Brute Force,” *Hind Swaraj*, by Mohandas Gandhi
- Large group discussion about Gandhi’s method of writing and the content of the reading to gain a deeper understanding of swaraj.
- Teacher shares personal narrative with class from personal history: “Martha and My Struggle: Lessons Learned about Love and Death” and Chavez’s eulogy to his mother Juana Estrada Chavez. (*This is my own story. Teachers are encouraged to choose a meaningful story where they learned a power life lesson*)
- Assign rough draft of Personal Narrative project.
- HW: Rough Draft of Personal Narrative

Day Three:

- Partner peer edit of Personal Narratives with discussion of expectations and rubric.
- Reading in class: Chapter XVII, “Passive Resistance,” *Hind Swaraj*, by Mohandas Gandhi
- Small group discussions about Gandhi’s conclusions about passive resistance, what it means, why it’s effective, and how it is achieved.
- HW: Final Draft of Personal Narrative

Day Four:

- Small group sharing of final drafts.
  - Identify quotes from other people’s story that resonate with them.
  - Choral reading the quotes
  - Create a found poem of the quotes as a class and put it on the wall.

- Debrief discussion:
  - Who told you a story that made you rethink your idea of a truth?
b. Who told you a story that was similar to yours where they arrived at a similar truth?
c. Who told you a story that was similar to yours where they arrived at a completely different truth?
d. What is the value of sharing our histories with each other in a history class? Provide some examples from stories you heard today.
e. How do a variety of perspectives on the world strengthen our understanding of history? Provide some examples from the stories you heard today.

Materials needed:

- Digital Story: *What Do You Know is True?*
- Photocopies of “Chapter XVI: Brute Force” and “Chapter XVII: Passive Resistance” from *Hind Swaraj*
- A written personal narrative of a life lesson by the teacher.
- “Our History” brainstorm sheet
- “Our History” personal narrative assignment
- “Our History” peer edit sheet
- “Our History” scoring guide

Appendix: Lesson Worksheets
**“Our History” Brainstorm Sheet #1**

**Our History**

- Pick 3 key NATIONAL OR GLOBAL historical events from your birth to the present (1996 – 2011 approximately). These events should be newsworthy events that a major impact on the lives of people around the world.
- On a separate sheet of paper, make a grid as shown below
- Provide written information for each one of the columns.
- This assignment is due next class.

My list (1996 – present):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Why important?</th>
<th>Lessons to be learned</th>
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Now, ask your parents for 3 events *from before you were born*. The same rules apply -- these should be national or global events. They should not be the same as your events. First, discuss their responses with them, and then please write their responses. Please do not ask your parents to complete the assignment for you.

Parents list:

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<th>Event</th>
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<th>Lessons to be learned</th>
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Our History Brainstorm Sheet #2

Add to your "Our History" Homework Assignment.

Please add three personal historical events to your “Our History” assignment. One of these events will become a topic for a personal narrative essay.

For each of these events, please consider the following question:

“Think of a time in your life where you made a mistake. Think about that moment in your life in detail. Consider the setting, the characters involved, the conflict, and how the conflict was resolved. Finally, explain what the lesson was that you learned. Also, describe what you had to unlearn. In other words, what untruth caused you to make that mistake? How did that lesson bring you closer to the truth, and improve you as a person?”

Use the table below to organize your work:

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Scoring Guide for the Personal Narrative Essay

Please revise the rough draft of your Personal Narrative in final draft form. Use the scoring guide below to improve your draft to the best of your ability:

The story provides the reader a deeper understanding of you. So, your story has a life lesson as its THEME (a mistake that you made, and meaningful lesson that resulted).

A detailed SETTING with clear imagery that inspires the imagination of the reader (when and where):

Detailed descriptions of CHARACTERS that bring the character to life for the reader in a convincing and thorough way (who)

Provides DIALOGUE (internal and among characters) that is realistic, and either helps move the plot forward or brings the characters more to life:

Engaging PLOT with a good CONFLICT and CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Organization:

- Your narrative should be typed, 1 1/2 spaced, 12 point or less, and at least a single page.
- Your narrative should be spell checked so there are no spelling errors.
- Your narrative should be grammar checked so that there is good sentence fluency and paragraphs.