Title of Lesson: Gandhi’s Voice: Writing as Nonviolent Resistance

Lesson By: Rebecca Eastman

Grade Level/Subject Areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lessons:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grade Eight, English Language Arts</td>
<td>Lesson one of two</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-30 students</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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Objectives of Lesson:

- Students will identify how Mahatma Gandhi used writing as a means of nonviolent communication, as a means to communicate nonviolence, and as a necessary tool for reflection and self development.
- Students will record with 80% accuracy, the genre, writing style, content and effect of two pieces of writing, one narrative and one expository.

Lesson Abstract:
In this lesson, eighth grade English Language Arts students will be introduced to M. K. Gandhi, not only as a nonviolent activist, but as a writer. After watching a short film on Gandhi as a writer, they will explore two excerpts of Gandhi’s writing, one narrative and the other expository. Students will identify the characteristics of what can make writing a nonviolent form of activism. Using a graphic organizer, students will work in groups to dissect Gandhi’s writing, categorizing the theme, similarities and differences, and effect of these excerpts. This and future lessons in the unit stress the importance of using one’s voice for social change.

Lesson Content:
Before the world knew Gandhi as one of the most influential persons of the 20th Century. Before he became a spiritual leader for India and the world, Gandhi was a man who wrote.

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in India in 1869, as a teen lived in England, as a young adult, South Africa and then back to India for the remainder of his life. Though always a conscious and kind person, the depth of his spirituality and goodness became more apparent as he grew into an adult. When Gandhi moved to South Africa in his twenties, it was to gain professional experience as a lawyer because he was not having luck in India. At that time South Africa as well as India was a part of the British Empire. Gandhi arrived in South Africa with a limited understanding of what it was like to be a person of color in a white European settlement. That changed very quickly when he found himself discriminated against solely because he was Indian. During his first days in South Africa, while traveling to meet a client, he purchased a first class ticket for a train. Upon entering his compartment, he was told to move by a passenger and some railway officers. After resisting, Gandhi was thrown off of the train with his luggage and spent the night in the train station. A couple days later, Gandhi was to take a coach to a nearby town. Again, the coach leader made him move to sit outside and not with the white passengers inside.
These and other incidents, as well as requests from other Indian acquaintances in South Africa, prompted Gandhi to extend his stay. Within weeks, Gandhi was actively seeking out ways to gain equality for Indians in South Africa. As time passed, he worked as a lawyer and learned more and more about the rights of citizens of the British government. His family joined him from India, his work took off. Gandhi was making a name for himself as an activist for Indian rights. With other Indians, Gandhi formed the Natal Indian Congress which formed an educational society for Colonial born Indians their children. Through the Congress, Gandhi was also able to defend abused Indian indentured servants in court, and push for their release from their employers.

In 1904, Gandhi, published his first newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, which communicated to the Indians, British and Dutch, the grievances of Indian citizens. At this time, Gandhi was also experimenting with what he calls, satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance. The term “satya” translates to “truth,” so satyagraha means a firm adherence to the truth. K. Chetty, author of *Gandhi: Mahatma in the Making*, informs us, “The newspaper not only reported on matters concerning the Indian population, but became the mouthpiece for the Natal Indian Congress. The paper stands out as the most faithful record of the passive resistance movement for the period 1906 to 1914. According to Gandhi, the Indian Opinion was meant to serve and keep the local and international communities informed of the events in South Africa and thereby function as an effective and potent weapon in the struggle.”

It was at this point that Gandhi the writer and Gandhi the leader of passive resistance merged together. Through the *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi’s nonviolent words were heard through nonviolent means: heartfelt journalism. Acknowledging the newspaper as a “mirror of my life,” he wrote in his autobiography: "Week after week I poured out my soul in its columns and expounded the principles and practice of satyagraha as I understood it. I cannot recall a word in these articles set down without thought or deliberation or a word of conscious exaggeration, or anything merely to please. Indeed, the journal became for me training in self-restraint and for friends a medium through which to keep in touch with my thoughts."

During his time in South Africa, Gandhi experimented with peaceful ways of living. For instance, he developed two separate farms, Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Farm, for those who joined Gandhi in his lifestyle of satyagraha and peace. Gandhi also experimented with fasting for atonement, and he took a vow of celibacy. Taking much inspiration from Emerson and Thoreau, he learned and taught others how to be civilly disobedient. Using his voice and action, he organized mass civil disobedience; bringing Thoreau’s and Emerson’s theories to a greater scale. Gandhi organized people to march for justice and against unfair laws. He helped begin strikes when Indians’ needs were not being met. When the government imposed sanctions on Indian citizens, Gandhi led those Indians in nonviolent resistance. He was arrested and held in jail often, along with his followers.

All of these stories and ideas were widely communicated through the *Indian Opinion*. The more Gandhi’s writing was read, the more support he had in his movements. Gandhi became a spiritual and political leader because of the inspirational and moving words he wrote. As his writing crossed the ocean to India, Gandhi became more popular and revered in his native home.
When Gandhi and his family moved back to India after twenty-two successful years in South Africa, he continued to live communally and practice satyagraha in all aspects of his life. He also continued to write. Through his two newspapers, Young India and Navajivan, Gandhi continues his mass communication of the injustices Indians faced as second class citizens of the British Empire, and how life in India can be transformed through satyagraha. He also published numerous articles and books on these subjects, including his famous, Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule.

In 1928, Gandhi published the first part of his autobiography, The Story of My Experiments With the Truth. This gave readers an insight to the experiences of Gandhi throughout his life. Reading about Gandhi’s upbringing and his run-ins with injustice as a young adult, allows others to see the context in which he lived, and why he believed in his convictions so greatly. Gandhi’s story also communicated his ideas and dreams, just as the Indian Opinion did.

Gandhi continued to write for the rest of his life. It is said that Gandhi was such a prolific writer that in order for him to acquire all the writing that has been gathered of his, he would have had to have written approximately 500 words for every day of his life.

In his many years of service, passive resistance and spiritual leadership, Mahatma Gandhi transformed the lives of many through his philosophies, his actions, and of course, through his writing.

Massachusetts State Content Standards: Grade Eight, English Language Arts
4.20 Determine the meaning of unfamiliar words using context clues (contrast, cause and effect).
8.26 Recognize organizational structures and use of arguments for and against an issue.
11.4 Analyze and evaluate similar themes across a variety of selections, distinguishing theme from topic.
13.22 Identify evidence used to support an argument.

Guiding Questions:
• What two genres of writing did Gandhi use in these excerpts? How are they similar and how do they differ?
• According to the excerpts you just read, how can writing be used as a tool for social change?
• These examples of Gandhi’s writings are nonviolent in their content and approach. Are there circumstances where honest, heartfelt writing can be violent?
• Which of these excerpts do feel is more successful at building awareness of violence and nonviolence?

Materials Needed
• Photocopied sheets of appendices A and B for each student
• Overhead copies of Appendices A and B
Lesson Context:
This is the first of two lessons modeling the power of the written word in nonviolent social change. Students often write narratives and position papers, but may not realize the impact their writing could have on a wider audience.

Before beginning this lesson, students will have already been introduced to life of Gandhi, the concepts of Ahimsa, Satyagraha (passive resistance), as well as the British rule of India and South Africa in the time of Gandhi. Discussions and activities on the concept of violence and what that is will have occurred as well. Students will be entering this lesson with the prior understanding of different forms of violence and ways it has been dealt with. Students will also be familiar with example of nonviolent struggle, including The Civil Rights Movement and Gandhi’s passive resistance against the British government in India.

The short movie, Gandhi as a Writer will be shown to set the stage of this lesson. This movie demonstrates how Gandhi used writing as means of nonviolent communication, especially in South Africa.

To continue exploring the concept of nonviolent communication through writing in lesson two, students will be given examples of personal journal entries from the Freedom Writers Diary. These journal entries exemplify how narrative writing about violence builds awareness about it. Students will then write a five paragraph narrative from personal experience that brings awareness to violence.

Teaching Activities:
1. DO NOW: Students will list at least five ways in which writing is used. Once the class settles in, briefly discuss the students’ lists and if not already mentioned, stress the importance of writing for awareness of social issues such as violence. Remind them that writing can be vitally important as a communication device and as a nonviolent outlet.
2. LESSON: Introduce the class to the short video, Gandhi as a Writer (attached to this lesson).
3. Following the video, the class will briefly recall the life of Gandhi, review the terms “satyagraha” and “ahimsa,” and discuss the context in which these terms were used.
4. Students will read two examples of Gandhi’s writing (Appendix A), an expository piece from Hind Swaraj, and a narrative piece from his autobiography; first silently and then with the teacher and class.
5. The class will briefly discuss the content of both excerpts and begin the dialogue about what makes this writing nonviolent.
6. In small groups, the students will complete the Comparing Writing chart (Appendix B). Each student will have her own paper, but the work may be completed with others.
7. Bringing the class together for discussion, introduce the chart. This may be done by asking each group to focus on one section of the chart and delegate a speaker for the group, or it can be done with voluntary responses. As this review happens, guide the students through areas where they may have been confused with Gandhi’s texts.
8. After all the discussion about Gandhi’s writings as nonviolent tools for social change,
prompt students to think about the possibility that honest, heartfelt writing could be violent. Could this be true and in what circumstances. This conversation could take your class in many different directions. Keep guiding your students to remember what constitutes violence to keep them focused. You may run out of time and have to continue in the next lesson.

9. Conclude by urging you students to think about violence that they have experienced or witnessed. Let them know that that will be a part of the next lesson’s assignment. Let them know that they will be viewing more nonviolent writing, but by authors closer to their age and from a more modern time.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
During this lesson, students will be informally assessed through class discussion and group participation. A formally assessed writing assignment will be given during lesson two.

**Bibliography:**


Here is an excerpt from Gandhi’s book, Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule). Gandhi published this book in India, however, wrote much of it while on a ship traveling from India to South Africa. Portions of this book were published in the” Indian Opinion.”

Passive resistance, that is, soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How, then, can it be considered only a weapon of the weak? Physical-force men are strangers to the courage that is requisite in a passive resister. Do you believe that a coward can ever disobey a law that he dislikes? Extremists are considered to be advocates of brute force. Why do they, then, talk about obeying laws? I do not blame them. They can say nothing else. When they succeed in driving out the English, and they themselves become governors, they will want you and me to obey their laws. And that is a fitting thing for their constitution. But a passive resister will say he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon.

and

Passive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it 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. Competition between passive resisters does not exhaust. The sword of passive resistance down not require a scabbard [cover]. It is strange indeed that you should consider such a weapon to be a weapon merely of the weak.

This is an excerpt from Gandhi’s, Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With the Truth. It recounts an experience Gandhi had when he first rode a train in South Africa.

The train reached Martizburg, the capital of Natal, at about 9 p.m. Beddings used to be provided at this station. A railway servant came and asked me if I wanted one. ‘No,’ said I, ‘I have one with me.’ He went away. But a passenger came next, and looked me up and down. He saw that I was a ‘coloured’ man. This disturbed him. Out he went and came in again with one or two officials. They all kept quiet, when another official came to me and said, ‘Come along, you must go to the van compartment.’

‘But I have a first class ticket,’ said I. ‘That doesn’t matter,’ rejoined the other. ‘I tell you, you must go to the van compartment.’

‘I tell you, I was permitted to travel in this compartment at Durban, and I insist on going on in it.’

‘No, you won’t,’ said the official. ‘You must leave this compartment, or else I shall have to call the police constable to push you out.’

‘Yes, you may. I refuse to get out voluntarily.’

The constable came. He took me by the hand and pushed me out. My luggage was also taken out. I refused to go to the other compartment and the train steamed away. I went and sat in the waiting room, keeping my hand-bag with me, and leaving the other luggage where it was. The railway authorities had taken charge of it.
## Appendix B

### Comparing Writing

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<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Excerpt 1</th>
<th>Excerpt 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Describe Writing Style</td>
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<td>Content (What is the author saying?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
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<td>Differences</td>
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<td>Which excerpt do you think conveys the author’s message most effectively and why?</td>
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  - Genre
  - Describe Writing Style
  - Content (What is the author saying?)
  - Similarities
  - Differences
  - Which excerpt do you think conveys the author’s message most effectively and why?