Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

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<th>Title of Lesson: Can Forgiveness Lead to Nonviolence?</th>
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<td>Lesson By: Natasha Efseaff</td>
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<td>Grade Level/ Subject Areas: Sophomores/World History</td>
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<td>Class Size: 35</td>
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<td>Time/ Duration of Lesson: 55 minutes/ 1-3 sessions</td>
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**Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:**
- To internalize the idea of nonviolence through the act of forgiveness.
- Students will create a definition of forgiveness after reading several examples from the life of Mohandas Gandhi.
- Then discuss if forgiveness is absolute or conditional.
- Explore the notion that forgiveness can lead to a nonviolent society
- Apply the idea internally by writing a letter of forgiveness to someone who has harmed them.

**Lesson Abstract:**
Students will define forgiveness and how it leads to nonviolence (ahimsa). They will develop the notion by examining forgiveness through the eyes of Mohandas Gandhi. By reading several examples from his life, students will consider if the idea of forgiveness is absolute or conditional? Students will explore further examples from World History on how the act of forgiveness leads to nonviolence within a society.

**Lesson Content:**
The notion of forgiveness is universal giving up resentment; but, the act itself is personal and far more complex. Individuals struggle and some never truly forgive; the idea of holding on ensures bad situations will not repeat themselves. For example individuals who have been cheated on in a personal relationship not only find it hard to trust again but struggle with truly letting go of the feelings towards the accused. Incidents of stealing can also leads to mistrust. Working relationships can lead to problems if someone feels underappreciated, a sense of individualism in the workplace overshadows the notion of teamwork. The famous saying “forgive but not forget,” depicts this notion. Holding on to the past does not enable us as individuals or as a society to move on and develop a strong notion of nonviolence.

The life of Mohandas Gandhi represents a success story of a man’s quest within himself that leads to a nonviolent struggle. Gandhi struggled to free India from the clutches of the British Empire. He saw forgiveness as part of nonviolence (ahimsa) leading towards the notion of satyagraha (truth-force). Truth is love according to Gandhi, through this act individuals become one within themselves. They are not only able to give up resentment but embrace others transforming the body and spirit. This process will transform both parties as opponents embrace the difference of others and create a new understanding (truth) within themselves.

Gandhi was a man who practiced forgiveness throughout his life. At a young age he was empowered by his father’s action of forgiveness. When Gandhi was a boy he stole from his brother to indulge a smoking habit. Consumed with guilt he confessed his sin to his father through a written note. His father had several options of action to his son’s sin: beat him, yell at him, kick him out, ignore the incident, or love and forgive his son. Gandhi’s father opted for
the last option and father and son embraced each other. This wonderful example helped lead Gandhi to embrace the notion of forgiveness through his thought, actions, and speech.

In South Africa, Gandhi practiced the notion of forgiveness as he fought for India swaraj (self rule). He was exposed to racial injustices in taxes, dress, and behavior by some British. For example, on one such occasion in South Africa, he wondered up the walkway and without warning was kicked to the ground. His instant forgiveness of his perpetrator is inspirational; it’s the sin not the sinner. Gandhi continued to hold onto this idea even when faced with death. He was assaulted by a white mob in Durban but he refused to prosecute them. His explanation was they were doing what they believed to be true. He forgave the angry mob not because he is passive but an act of violence should not be followed by another act of violence, violence is never the answer.

Throughout modern World History examples of forgiveness have led individuals and societies to practice the notion of nonviolence. During the harsh times of WWII, individuals struggled for their lives under the Nazi Regime. Eva Kor found herself as a child in the worst prison imaginable, Auschwitz. Losing all but her twin sister, Eva struggled to survive. Years after the horrific event, Eva returned to the concentration camp that held her prisoner. Determined that self healing would free herself, she forgave those who inflicted pain upon her and her family. Acts such Eva Kor’s provide hope that nonviolence societies are possible.

In South Africa, the search for truth will help lead a society on the path of nonviolence. The English and Dutch fought for control of South Africa during the Boer Wars. Once the English ensured victory the natives of South Africa faced ill-treatment for hundreds of years. As the country tried to become democratic feeling against an oppressive regime, the Apartheid, surfaced. Reconciliation Commissions were set up as people searched for the truth.

In today’s society we can learn from the ideas and practices of Mohandas Gandhi. Forgiveness might be complex, but opening the mind to the idea will enable individuals to become one within themselves. Gandhi’s constant pursuits of truth along with his willingness to love and forgive are a model not only for leaders of the modern world but for individuals as well. His life is his message. And success stories of forgiveness such as Eva Kor and the Reconciliation Commission in South Africa are steps in the right direction of believing in nonviolent acts. Forgiveness is one step toward swaraj, oneness with oneself body and soul.

California State Content Standards:
World History:
10.4, 3. Explain imperialism from the perspective of the colonizers and the colonized and the varied immediate and long-term responses by the people under colonial rule.

10.10, 3. Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

Guiding Questions:
• What is forgiveness?
• When should we forgive someone?
• Is there a time when someone does not deserve to be forgiven?
After discussing Gandhi’s notion of forgiveness and examples of the Holocaust and South Africa:
- Should we as individuals and a society always forgive?
- Is forgiveness absolute or conditional?

### Materials Needed:
- Handout: Examples of forgiveness through the eyes of Gandhi plus answers (attached)
- Storyboard (*Forgiveness with hope* can be shown after discussing Gandhi’s ideas of forgiveness. Then revisit the idea if forgiveness is absolute or conditional.)
- Film: *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*
- PBS: Religion & Ethics “Holocaust Forgiveness Advocates Eva Kor” Segment (see link below)
- Film: *Long Night’s Journey into Day*

### Lesson Context:
This lesson can be taught after teaching a unit on Gandhi to depict the perspective of the colonized during the period of imperialism under the British empire. Another approach would be to teach the segment at the end of the year enabling students to find examples of nonviolence throughout history and today.

### Teaching Activities:

**Step 1:** Whole class discussion: As a class, students will create a definition of forgiveness.

**Step 2:** The teacher will then pose two critical thinking questions:
- When should we forgive someone?
- Is there a time when someone does not deserve to be forgiven?

**Step 3:** Text Analysis: As a class, students will read three examples of forgiveness in the life of Mohandas Gandhi (see attached handout: Forgiveness in the eyes of Gandhi)

**Step 4:** Critical Thinking: As a class or individually, students will answer and discuss the seven guided questions using the above handout. (see attached handout: Answers Forgiveness in the eyes of Gandhi).

**Step 5:** Socratic Seminar—students will then recreate a new definition of forgiveness

**Step 6:** Analytical thinking: Students will then view the storyboard (*Forgiveness with hope*)

**Step 7:** Students will view the PBS segment of Religion & Ethics: “Holocaust Forgiveness Advocates Eva Kor”

**Step 8:** Students will then view the film *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, the 2nd segment dealing with “On Trauma and Forgiveness” with Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela.

**Step 9:** Whole class discussion: Students will revisit the notion of forgiveness and answer two questions
- Should we as individuals and a society always forgive?
- Is forgiveness absolute or conditional?

### Assessment/Evaluation:
Evaluation is based on class participation during discussion and credit/no credit basis for the completion of the guided questions.
**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**

1) If more time is available students can watch *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*, and write letters to Eva Kor about her self-healing act.
2) Create a project of forgiveness within the class: Students will internalize forgiveness by writing a letter to someone, who in their eyes has harmed them, and forgive them. They will have the option of sending the letter to the individual.
   Ex: They can ask a parent forgiveness for their bad attitude or poor decisions in school or with friends
   -or-
   Ex: Forgive someone for hitting them or gossiping against them
   (This internal and external process will give hope that forgiveness will begin to spread in their lives and on campus.)

**Bibliography:**


*Forgiving Dr. Mengele.* First Run Pictures, 2006


Religion & Ethics Newsweekly. [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1046/profile.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1046/profile.html)

*Religion & Ethics*: “Holocaust Forgiveness Advocate Eva Kor.” PBS, July 13, 2007

Forgiveness through the eyes of Gandhi

Example #1
But much more serious than this theft was the one I was guilty of a little later. I pilfered the coppers when I was twelve or thirteen, possibly less. The other theft was committed when I was fifteen. In this case I stole a bit of gold out of my meat-eating brother’s armlet. This brother had run into a debt of about twenty-five rupees. He had on his arm an armlet of solid gold. It was not difficult to clip a bit out of it.

Well, it was done, and the debt cleared. But this became more than I could bear. I resolved never to steal again. I also made up my mind to confess it to my father. But I did not dare to speak. Not that I was afraid of my father beating me. No I do not recall his ever having beaten any of us. I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. But I felt that the risk should be taken; that there could not be a cleaning without a clean confession.

I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father, and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I asked adequate punishment for it, and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offence. I also pledged myself never to steal in future.

I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father. He was then suffering from a fistula and was confined to bed. His bed was a plain wooden plank. I handed him the note and sat opposite the plank.

He read it through, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. If I were a painter I could draw a picture of the whole scene today. It is still so vivid in my mind.

Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is. As the hymn says: 'Only he Who is smitten with the arrows of love. Knows its power.'

This was, for me, an object-lesson in Ahimsa. Then I could read in it nothing more than a father's love, but today I know that it was pure Ahimsa. When such Ahimsa becomes all-embracing it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power.

Guided questions:
1) What crime did Gandhi commit?
2) How did Gandhi’s father find out about the crime?
3) Explain the importance of the reaction by Gandhi’s father to the confession?

Example #2
These connections were useful to me later on in my public life, and simplified much of my work. The consequences of the regulation regarding the use of footpaths were rather serious for me. I always went out for a walk through President Street to an open plain. President Kruger's house was in this street a very modest, unostentatious building, without a garden, and not distinguishable from other houses in its neighbourhood. The houses of many of the millionaires
in Pretoria were far more pretentious, and were surrounded by gardens. Indeed President Kruger's simplicity was proverbial. Only the presence of a police patrol before the house indicated that it belonged to some official. I nearly always went along the footpath past this patrol without the slightest hitch or hindrance. Now the man on duty used to be changed from time to time. Once one of these men, without giving me the slightest warning, without even asking me to leave the footpath, pushed and kicked me into the street. I was dismayed. Before I could question him as to his behaviour, Mr. Coates, who happened to be passing the spot on horseback, hailed me and said: 'Gandhi, I have seen everything. I shall gladly be your witness in court if you proceed against the man. I am very sorry you have been so rudely assaulted.' 'You need not be sorry,' I said. 'What does the poor man know? All coloured people are the same to him. He no doubt treats Negroes just as he has treated me. I have made it a rule not to go to court in respect of any personal grievance. So I do not intend to proceed against him.' 'That is just like you,' said Mr. Coates, but do think it over again. We must teach such men a lesson.' He then spoke to the policeman and reprimanded him. I could not follow their talk, as it was in Dutch, the policeman being a Boer. But he apologized to me, for which there was no need. I had already forgiven him. But I never again went through this street. There would be other men coming in this man's place and, ignorant of the incident, they would behave likewise. Why should I unnecessarily court another kick? I therefore selected a different walk. The incident deepened my feeling for the Indian settlers. I discussed with them the advisability of making a test case, if it were found necessary to do so, after having seen the British Agent in the matter of these regulations.

Part II Ch 38 “What it is to be a ‘Coolie’”

Guided Questions:

4) What happen to Gandhi in the example above?
5) How does Gandhi react to the incident?

Example #3

So the ships were brought into the dock and the passengers began to go ashore. But Mr. Escombe had sent word to the captain that, as the whites were highly enraged against me and my life was in danger, my family and I should be advised to land at dusk, when the Port Superintendent Mr. Tatum would escort us home. The captain communicated the message to me, and I agreed to act accordingly. But scarcely half an hour after this, Mr. Laughton came to the captain. He said: 'I would like to take Mr. Gandhi with me, should he have no objection. As the legal adviser of the Agent Company I tell you that you are not bound to carry out the message you have received from Mr. Escombe.' After this he came to me and said somewhat to this effect: 'If you are not afraid, I suggest that Mrs. Gandhi and the children should drive to Mr. Rustomji's house, whilst you and I follow them on foot. I do not at all like the idea of your entering the city like a thief in the night. I do not think there is any fear of anyone hurting you. Everything is quiet now. The whites have all dispersed. But in any case I am convinced that you ought not to enter the city stealthily.' I readily agreed. My
wife and children drove safely to Mr. Rustomji's place. With the captain's permission I went ashore with Mr. Laughton. Mr Rustomji's house was about two miles from the dock.

As soon as we landed, some youngsters recognized me and shouted 'Gandhi, Gandhi.' About half a dozen men rushed to the spot and joined in the shouting. Mr. Laughton feared that the crowd might swell and hailed a rickshaw. I had never liked the idea of being in a rickshaw. This was to be my first experience. But the youngsters would not let me get into it. They frightened the rickshaw boy out of his life, and he took to his heels. As we went ahead, the crowd continued to swell, until it became impossible to proceed further. They first caught hold of Mr. Laughton and separated us. Then they pelted me with stones, brickbats and rotten eggs. Some one snatched away my turban, whilst others began to batter and kick me. I fainted and caught hold of the front railings of a house and stood there to get my breath. But it was impossible. They came upon me boxing and battering. The wife of the Police Superintendent, who knew me, happened to be passing by. The brave lady came up, opened her parasol though there was no sun then, and stood between the crowd and me. This checked the fury of the mob, as it was difficult for them to deliver blows on me without harming Mrs. Alexander.

Meanwhile an Indian youth who witnessed the incident had run to the police station. The Police Superintendent Mr. Alexander sent a posse of men to ring me round and escort me safely to my destination. They arrived in time. The police station lay on our way. As we reached there, the Superintendent asked me to take refuge in the station, but I gratefully declined the offer, 'They are sure to quiet down when they realize their mistake,' I said. 'I have trust in their sense of fairness.' Escorted by the police, I arrived without further harm at Mr. Rustomji's place. I had bruises all over, but no abrasions except in one place. Dr. Dadibarjor, the ship's doctor, who was on the spot, rendered the best possible help.

After the incident Gandhi wrote:

'I do not want to prosecute anyone. It is possible that I may be able to identify one or two of them, but what is the use of getting them punished? Besides, I do not hold the assailants to blame. They were given to understand that I had made exaggerated statements in India about the whites in Natal and calumniated them. If they believed these reports, it is no wonder that they were enraged. The leaders and, if you will permit me to say so, you are to blame. You could have guided the people properly, but you also believed Reuter and assumed that I must have indulged in exaggeration. I do not want to bring anyone to book. I am sure that, when the truth becomes known, they will be sorry for their conduct.'

'Would you mind giving me this in writing?' said Mr. Escombe. 'Because I shall have to cable to Mr. Chamberlain to that effect. I do not want you to make any statement in haste. You may, if you like, consult Mr. Laughton and your other friends, before you come to a final decision. I may confess, however, that, if you waive the right of bringing your assailants to book, you will considerable help me in restoring quiet, besides enhancing your own reputation.'
"Thank you,' said I. 'I need not consult anyone. I had made my decision in the matter before I came to you. It is my conviction that I should not prosecute the assailants, and I am prepared this moment to reduce my decision to writing.'

Part III Ch 3 “The Test”

Guided Questions

6) What happens to Gandhi when he exits the boat?
7) Why does Gandhi decide not to prosecute his assailants?

Forgiveness through the eyes of Gandhi: Answers

Example 1:
1) Stealing gold off his brother’s armlet
2) Gandhi confessed to his father by writing him a letter
3) Instead of punishing his son, Gandhi’s father embraced him, forgave him for his wrong doing, and held his son as they cried together in each others arms. This is a pivotal moment in Gandhi’s life; this will set the precedent on how Gandhi will continuously forgive individuals for their wrongdoings

Example 2:
4) Gandhi wanders onto the footpath in South Africa is pushed and kicked into the street
5) Using the above precedent from example 1, Gandhi forgives the man without a second thought. This is an example how Gandhi is putting to practice his ideals of ahimsa (nonviolence) leading him towards swaraj (oneness within yourself). Notice that he will take another path, not allowing the same situation to occur again.
   “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice shame on me”

Example 3:
6) Gandhi gets mauled by an angry mob
7) Instead of blaming the individuals for the physical harm against him, Gandhi forgives them of their ignorance but blames the leaders that printed false information leading to the enragenment of the crowd. Again Gandhi forgives individuals for the violence that is thrust upon him and continues to follow his teaching of ahimsa. He becomes a model for others which ultimately helped India free itself from the British Empire.