# Title of Lesson:
Food: Sustenance and Sustainability

# Lesson By:
Catie Griesdorn, Sunnyside Environmental School in Portland, OR

# Grade Level:
Kindergarten and Fourth Grade Buddies

# Duration of Lesson:
45 minute sessions 1 day a week for 8 weeks

# Relevant State Standards: Oregon

**Geography**
Understand how people and the environment are interrelated.
SS.03.GE.05 Understand how peoples’ lives are affected by the physical environment

**Science**
K.3 Scientific Inquiry: Science explores the natural world through observation
K.3S.1 Explore questions about living and non-living things and events in the natural world

# Lesson Abstract:
This lesson is about both Mohandas Gandhi and Cesar Chavez’s ideas of sustainability, food production, and dissemination for the greater good of the community. Teacher will introduce unit posed as an inquiry question, “Are we maximizing use of the food we produce in our school gardens? If not, what could we do differently?”

# Guiding Questions:
- What ideas do Gandhi and Chavez have concerning sustainable food systems? How can we apply these ideas to school gardens?
- How do we care for others and ourselves including community members?
- How can we better care for ourselves and others, including community members?

# Content Essay:
At Sunnyside Environmental School, the motto is “Let nature be your teacher” (SES website). The K-8 curriculum is based on the seasons, gardens, and is project-based. The school is tied to the natural community as far as monitoring, but at this time does not actively seek to identify and solve larger community problems. Jose Calderón, a professor sociology and Chicano studies at Pitzer College, writes that the most effective way of learning is when “Students use participatory community-based research and action to locate solutions” (7). By developing awareness of the greater community and the economic disconnect that affects so many members in Kindergarten, students will internalize and nurture a critical eye and an open heart. It also allows students to participate as a teacher as well as a learner, providing a sense of their innate knowledge and its value. As Calderon reflects on his own experiences as teacher learner, “By working instead toward ‘mutual learning,’ the staff and students could and did learn from each other, each respecting the individual character of the other” (Calderón 6).

The student responsibilities to the school and garden increase as the students get older. In Kindergarten the focus is on turning the soil and planting the seeds. They also do some harvesting as bountiful crops such as spinach and potatoes become ripe. It is one of the students’ most-cherished activities in the school day. By putting weekly effort into the
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care of their garden they are filled with delight and pride when it proves fruitful. However, over the summer, students and staff are all away from the school, and this is the most bountiful part of the growing season. Fruit and vegetables are often harvested by community members walking by or left to rot. By posing the questions, “What could be done with the fruits and veggies over the summer? Are there people who are in need of food in our community who could benefit?” students will work together with their fourth grade buddy class to gather information, make a class decision, and implement it in the spring.

Mohandas Gandhi and Cesar Chavez were not only nonviolent resisters but social justice activists, especially for the poor in their respective communities. Both witnessed and experienced poverty and powerlessness, though in different ways and at different times. They both also believed in and fought for equity, that all people should be treated fairly and have equal access to necessary resources. This paper examines Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa and India and Chavez’s activism in California as a model for the foundation of sustainability and importance of the school community connection when implementing this Kindergarten inquiry unit. As Chavez said, in response to a speech honoring Martin Luther King Jr., “I challenge you to carry on his work by volunteering to work for a just cause you believe in. . . free your fellow human beings from the yoke of oppression” (166).

In India and South Africa in the first quarter of the 20th century, Gandhi encouraged the village system of everyone contributing manual work for the village. “In a country so overpopulated and so heavily dependent on agriculture, the villages held the key to economic and political development” (Parel liv). It was every adult’s duty to gain work that bettered his or her community. He also believed that all work was equally valuable. Gandhi urged all people to become self-sustainable because he believed that was the path to swaraj, or home rule. This was evident in the creation of ashrams in both South Africa and India. In the ashrams people from all castes and religions ultimately were welcomed, with the commitment to contribute to the well being of all living and working there. This is easily related to the kindergarten garden curriculum our job as teachers is not only to tie students to their natural community but to the humanity as well.

Outside of the ashrams Gandhi spread his message of sustainability to all. He constantly warned of the dangers of modern civilization that led to greed, competition, and ultimately destruction. He said, “Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary to clothe and house himself” (Parel 155). He also believed in the value of education for all children and uneducated adults, but stressed the importance of developing the whole child with the responsibility to fully participate in society. “It develops both the body and the mind, keeps the child rooted to the soil with a glorious vision of the future, in the realization of which he or she begins to take his or her share from the very commencement of his or her career in school” (Parel 174). By emphasizing the importance of community and responsibility over self, Gandhi envisioned a new India. He quotes Aldous Huxley’s idea of a person’s education as “[a] mind stored with a knowledge of the fundamental truths of nature . . .
whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience” (Parel 99).

Cesar Chavez was a labor activist and farm worker in California in the 1950’s until the end of his life. Instilled with values of fairness, service, and compassion from his mother at a very young age, Chavez quit working in the farms to organize workers to unite for better working conditions and voting rights. Farm growers were severely mistreated their workers, provided minimal wages, unfit dwellings, long hours, and sprayed highly poisonous pesticides all over the fields. His activism was unique as he saw the value of not only community but first and foremost the family unit. “Cesar understood that family life is an essential element bringing out very humanity as persons, and that an economic system that does not serve persons as members as families is an economic system that must be opposed, confronted, and transformed (Orosco 49). Family is an idea that Kindergarten students easily understand, and connection between the school and families it serves is crucial to building a strong and supportive community. By strengthening these ties, families are able to connect with community members. During his lecture at the Ahimsa Institute 2011, Orosco stated, “It is not enough to teach our young people to be successful, to progress as individuals while our friends and neighbors are left behind. Our end goal of education should surely be service to others”

This inquiry directly links students and their families to the larger community through surveying, discovering untapped resources and ultimately hoping to provide work/harvest space for those who need and want it. As schools were created as the center of the community, this back to the roots approach strengthens these ties and for the benefit of all. As Orosco said, “Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed” (23). Social change starts from the ground up, and even are youngest community members are capable of great ideas, especially with family support. They are often the ones with the most compassion and biggest dreams, as their lives have not yet been hardened by society and its stresses and disappointments. “The greatest tragedy is to be born but not to live for fear of losing a little security of because we are afraid of loving and giving ourselves to other people” (Orosco 92).

Gandhi and Chavez dedicated their life to service to others and improvement of society for the benefit of all. They also believed that real education should be available to everyone, and the goals of education should be skills training, knowledge acquisition, self-empowerment, and service to others. Not just community service, but forming lasting relationships with community members and partners that is sustained over the years. A relationship where all parties benefit. Through examining the question of the wasted food over the summer in our school gardens, students will get real world opportunities to apply skills of math, literacy, social science, and science based research skills taught in the classroom. By partnering with fourth graders, they will form relationships that broaden their school community, and enable them to communicate with the written word. These relationships will benefit all parties, each individual as an expert on themselves and their own situation, and gaining friendship, life skills, and for some, decrease in hunger and increase in meaningful work. As Chavez said, “True wealth is not measured in money or
status or power. It is measured in the legacy we leave behind for those we love and those we inspire” (223).

**Bibliography:**

Orosco, José. *Cesar Chavez and the Common Sense of Nonviolence.* New Mexico: Albuquerque, 2008

**Websites:**
Sunnyside Environmental School [www.sesptsa.com](http://www.sesptsa.com)

**Teaching Activities:**
- Work with sustainability and garden coordinators throughout the year to link garden to community
- Weekly garden work with Sustainability coordinator and reflection in Science Journal (illustration)
- Daily Walk identifying food sources
- Food unit-production, nutrition, world foods
- **BIG PROJECT:** Inquiry into garden food waste during the summer. Investigate problem of garden maintenance and harvest over the summer. Create interview questions with buddies and research possible solutions by interacting with neighbors, Methodist church, other students, and families of the students. Through consensus choose a possible solution. Work together with fourth grade buddy class. Implement idea over the summer, and begin next year with an evaluation of efficacy of community linkage/less food waste/less work for sustainability coordinator with the next year’s class in the fall. Reflection on what to try/revise/do linking the community to the gardens in the coming spring.

**Materials:**
- School garden
- White board, Dry erase markers
- Paper, Pencils
- Sustainability coordinator
- Clipboards for surveying community members
- Community resource ideas: Methodist church, Belmont St., neighbors, students’ families
- Science Journals