Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Lesson Plan

**Studying Social Cognition through the Life of Cesar Chavez**

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**Grade Level/ Subject Areas:** 11th grade / Psychology

**Duration of Lesson:** 3 days

**Content Standards** (National standards from National Psychological Association):

VC-1.4 Assess some methods used to change attitudes. Students may indicate this by citing research on the effects of persuasion.

VC-2.2 Discuss how social and cultural categories affect behavior. Students will indicate this by discussing how membership in particular social categories (e.g., gender, age, and sexual orientation) can affect how individuals are treated, and how that treatment can change over time and differ across cultures.

VC-3.3 Explore the nature and effects of bias and discrimination. Students may indicate this by describing how social biases create a world where one kind of person is considered to be normative, and other kinds of persons are "different" (e.g., males are normative, whereas females are different; European Americans are normative, whereas other ethnic groups are different).

**Lesson Abstract:**
This lesson is an introduction to social cognition / social psychology. Social psychology is the study of human interactions—this lesson will follow the ideas and themes presented in chapter 20 in textbook *Psychology: Principles in Practice* by Spencer Rathus (2010). In addition, students will be introduced to the life Cesar Chavez and his work to create humane working conditions for California farm workers. Specifically, the following terms will be explained by analyzing Cesar Chavez’s struggle: cognitive evaluation, cognitive anchors, persuasion, discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and social perception. Students will then watch a documentary about Cesar Chavez and connect events in the film to the term/definitions presented in chapter 20 in textbook *Psychology: Principles in Practice* by Spencer Rathus (2010). Finally, students will analyze the ways in which Cesar Chavez used symbols, words, and slogans (Viva La Causa) to message his call for action—students will create their own “CD cover” to convey a message about discrimination / prejudice that they see in their own communities.
Guiding Questions:
1. How do children develop attitudes, values, and beliefs—and how do these beliefs affect people’s actions? How do individuals develop prejudicial beliefs, which result in discrimination?

2. In what ways was Cesar Chavez a persuasive leader for La Causa and the United Farm Workers Association?

3. How are visual images and text use to affect people’s beliefs—especially, how can images and texts be used to combat racism, discrimination, and oppression?

Content Essay:

Social psychology is the study of human interactions—this essay will follow the ideas and themes presented in chapter 20 (Social Cognition) of the textbook *Psychology: Principles in Practice* by Spencer Rathus. Cesar Chavez’s work to create humane working conditions for California farm workers can be analyzed through the lens of social psychology. Specifically, the following terms will be explained by analyzing Cesar Chavez’s struggle: cognitive evaluation, cognitive anchors, persuasion, discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and social perception.

Cesar Chavez was the first person in U.S History to organize a successful for union for farm workers, however his path was not simple nor was it free of obstacles. For example, Cesar recalled that many of his classmates held racist stereotypes about Mexicans. Stereotypes are oversimplified and distorted beliefs about groups of people (Rathus, 2010). For example, some of his classmates assumed that Cesar was “dirty” just because he was Mexican and they made fun of him for this (CA Dept. of Ed., 2011). Stereotypes can be very inaccurate because they ignore people’s individualism and assume that all people in one group are the same (e.g. Mexicans as being “dirty”).

As a child, César Chávez faced serious discrimination—discrimination is the unfair treatment of individuals because they are members of a particular group (Rathus, 2010). Skin color, sex, religion, and even weight can be the basis of discrimination. An example of discrimination that Chavez faced was when he went to restaurant as a child and ordered a hamburger—the waitress replied, “We don’t sell to Mexicans” (CA Dept. of Ed). Chavez also recalls being discriminated against by white teachers and was punished for speaking Spanish, “when we spoke Spanish, the teacher swooped down on us. I remember the ruler whistling through the air as it’s edge came down sharply across my knuckles” (Del Castillo, 1995). Facing discrimination of this type affected Cesar’s beliefs about the significance of racism and injustice.

There are various causes of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping. Two common causes are: social learning and justification of economic status (Rathus, 2010). Social learning is when people (especially children) acquire negative attitudes or beliefs about specific groups of people from adults or from the larger society. Cesar’s teacher, classmates, and the waitress most likely acquired their negative attitudes about Mexicans from the larger society or from their parents. The other main cause of discrimination and prejudice is justifying of economic status—some people, such as many of the growers and farm owners, are
discriminate against those in a different economic or racial groups as an excuse for injustices (such as paying farmer workers too little or not providing them with safe working conditions).

It was not only Cesar’s experiences of discrimination that shaped his beliefs—Cesar’s mother also instilled in him several cognitive anchors. Cognitive anchors are persistent beliefs that shape the ways in which a person sees the world, interprets events, and thus behave (Rathus, 2010). Often, cognitive anchors are peoples’ earliest memories. Cesar’s mother, Juana, set an example of the importance of helping others. Chávez recalled that she, “had made a pledge never to turn away anyone who came for food, and there were a lot of ordinary people who would come and a lot of hobos, at any time of the day or night. Most of them were white” (Griswold, 1995). Similarly, Cesar’s grandmother, taught him about generosity and compassion through teaching Cesar about the importance of helping others. Cesar recalls, “I didn’t realize the wisdom in her words, but it has been proven to me so many times since” (Griswold, 1995).

The stories told by Cesar Chavez’s grandmother affected his social perception. Social perception is the way in which people perceive others and it can affect the attitudes people form toward one another (Rathus, 2010). Cesar’s grandparents told him stories about the injustices of life in Mexico—stories about Mexican landowners who exploited their workers by demanding that they work long hours for inadequate pay. These stories caused Cesar to perceive poor people as being ethically superior to rich people because they were harder working. Cesar saw this first hand when he was ten years old—in 1937 Cesar’s his family was evicted from their farm in Arizona, so that had to move to California as migrant farm workers. Moving to California and working as a migrant farmer was an opportunity for Cesar to engage in cognitive evaluation. Cognitive evaluation occurs when people evaluate their experiences and form beliefs on the basis of these evaluations (Rathus, 2010). As a migrant farm worker, Cesar and his family would wake up at 3 a.m. to work in the field all day for very little pay. This experience allowed Cesar to evaluate the story his grandparents told him about poor people working hard to keep rich landowners wealthy. This cognitive evaluation led Cesar to believe the stories his grandparents told him—he knew from a young age that he wanted to help find a solution to this injustice.

Many years later, Cesar would use persuasion in order to organize non-violent protests against unfair, unsafe working conditions of farm workers. Persuasion is an attempt to influence other people’s attitudes or actions (Rathus, 2010). Not all persuasion is negative. For example, in the case of Cesar Chavez, he worked with farm workers of different ethnicities such as Latin Americans, African Americans, Anglo Americans, and Asian Americans. Cesar noticed that they all had similar experiences of being treated unfairly by landowners and farm owners. Cesar spoke to hundreds of farm workers and persuaded them to join his struggle against unfair working conditions. Cesar did this through two basic types of persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route (Rathus, 2010)—the most persuasive messages use both routes. The central route uses evidence and logical arguments to persuade people; in the central route, the message itself is most important. One way that Cesar used the central route was by explaining to his fellow farmworkers that The National Labor Relations Act of that Congress passed in 1935 insured the right of all labor groups to organize (Ingram, 2003). Cesar also used the peripheral route, which attempts to associate
people or events with positive or negative cues—Cesar did this by creating a sense of fellowship and camaraderie among diverse groups and named this struggle *La Causa*. Cesar and the farmworkers even adopted a symbol for their struggle—a black eagle against an inverted pyramid. In the peripheral route, the message is important, but it does not stand alone. The messenger also plays an important role—Cesar’s determination and generous demeanor clearly played an important role in persuading the farmworkers to come together for the same cause, *La Causa*. Eventually, in 1932 the National Farm Workers Association was established—as a result, Cesar Chavez became the first person in the history of the United States to organize a successful union for farm workers (Ingram, 2003).

Although the establishment of the National Farm Workers Association was a huge success, it did not solve all of the problems faced by California Farm workers. In fact, some of the farm workers became discouraged with using nonviolent means and suggested that they to resort to violence. Chavez responded by fasting as a reminder to the workers of their commitment to non-violence (Ingram, 2003). That said, Cesar’s decision to fast was both spiritual and political. It was spiritual in the sense that Catholic Mexican’s have a tradition of fasting as way to demonstrate humility and discipline in the face of obstacles (Calderon, 2011). His fast was also political in the sense that he was using peripheral persuasion and emotional appeal to elicit support from the broader community. An emotional appeal is an attempt to arouse feelings such as loyalty, admiration, jealousy, or fear rather than by convincing through evidence or logic (Rathus, 2010). Cesar hoped that by fasting he could bring national attention and support for *La Causa*. Indeed, his fasts did bring National Attention to *La Causa* and millions of consumers stop purchasing Delano grapes (CA Dept of Ed, 2011).

Cesar Chavez remains an historical icon largely because he was instrumental in bringing national attention to the plight of California farmworkers. However, equally noteworthy was Cesar’s ability to organize a successful non-violent movement among members of different racial groups. Cesar Chavez brought together farm workers of different ethnicities such as Latin Americans, African Americans, Anglo Americans, and Asian Americans. By doing so, he was able bridge racial divides to bring attention to the injustices faced by farmworkers and create a lasting legacy of non-violent social change.

Bibliography:
Teaching Activities:

Day 1:

Step 1. As a hook, show the digital story linked to this lesson. Then, pose the following question to students: are racism and other types of discrimination still present in the United States today? Students can do a quick write (3-5 minutes), followed by a whole class discussion—write students’ examples / evidence about whether or not racism/discrimination still exists today on the board, overhead, or chart paper.

Step 2. Introduce the terms: cognitive evaluation, cognitive anchors, persuasion, discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and social perception to students via the content essay above. Tell students to highlight the **bolded** words and the definition of each.

Step 3. In preparation to watch *Viva La Causa*, students will set up a piece of loose-leaf paper in following manner (or teacher can create a handout):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term:</th>
<th>Examples from <em>Viva La Causa</em>:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive evaluation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive anchors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Perception</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Step 4. Students will watch *Viva La Causa* and find examples / evidence of each of above key terms as seen in the film. Students should have at least one example for each row, but will be given extra credit for additional examples (optional).

Day 2:

Step 5. As a class, recall and reflect on *Viva La Causa* by having students share out what evidence they saw of each of the terms. Again, record students’ responses on the overhead, whiteboard, or chart paper.
Step 6. Explain to students that one of the ways that Cesar Chavez was able to unify and persuade the farmworkers to join La Causa and remain dedicated to non-violence was through the use of visual image and slogans. The black eagle and red and white flag became a uniting image for the union. The symbolism was: the Black Eagle signified the dark situation of the farm worker. The white circle signified hope and aspirations. The red background stood for the hard work and sacrifice that the union members would have to give. They also adopted an official slogan, “Viva la Causa” (Long Live our Cause).

Step 7. Remind students that much of our culture is built around images matched with text (i.e. the Nike swoosh, iPod/Apple, Coca Cola symbol, etc.) and brief but powerful texts (Got Milk?, Black is Beautiful, One Love, etc.). An example of an image matched with a message occurs on CD or album covers. The text, in the form of a title, matches an image, which in turn matches the C.D. contents (the songs). All pieces contribute to send the user a message.

Step 8. Show students images that perpetuate or challenge issues of prejudice/discrimination: i.e. the Nazi swastika, the Black Power fist, UFWA Eagle, etc. Briefly discuss what each image is trying to convey. Also, brainstormed words that would contribute to the meaning of the image.

Day 3:

Step 9. Students will now create their own image and text, in the form of a CD cover. The student should first brainstorm what a message about prejudice/discrimination/racism that they want to convey (i.e. prejudice was everywhere, prejudice is rooted in ignorance, etc.). Remind students that the title/text and the image on the cover should convey a unified message.

Step 10. Provide students with square pieces of paper (use a CD cover to get the accurate size/shape), markers, pens, etc. Allow students an entire class period to work on the CD cover and take home to complete, if necessary.

Day 4:

Step 11. Allow students to volunteer to share and explain their CD cover in front of the class. Display all CD covers on a bulletin board throughout the unit.