Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute

Title: Gandhi and Lord of the Flies: Does “the apparel oft proclaim the man”?

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Location: Acton, Massachusetts

Grade Level/Subject Areas: High School English (grade depends on curriculum)

Duration of Lesson: 1-3 class periods, but ideally this would be a part of a larger unit that paralleled the study of Lord of the Flies with Gandhian thought on civilization.

Relevant State/National Standards:

Massachusetts Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12
* 9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources

Massachusetts Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12
* 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text

Massachusetts Reading Standards for Literature 6–12
* MA.8.A. Analyze a work of fiction, poetry, or drama using a variety of critical lenses (e.g., formal, psychological, historical, sociological, feminist)

Lesson Abstract
This lesson allows students to compare Gandhi’s understanding of civilization with William Golding’s and their own, with a focus on clothing. While Golding’s Lord of the Flies suggests that when people dress primitively, they are more likely to act “uncivilized,” Gandhi’s philosophy suggests otherwise. This lesson both exposes students to Gandhian thought and allows students to explore differing views: one from the colonizer, and one from the colonized.

Guiding Questions
1. What does it meant to be civilized?
2. Is there any connection between Gandhi’s understanding of the significance of clothing and Golding’s, as evidenced in LOTF?
3. Does “the clothing make the man”? 
Content Essay

One of the most famous metaphors taught in conjunction with *Lord of the Flies* is clothing as representative of civilization. As the “civilized British schoolboys” lose their traditional Western clothing in favor of more “tribal” garb, they become the savages they appear to be, and lose sense of who they were before the plane crash. Students read this text and take the lack of clothes to be a gateway to loss of morals. The children forget who they once were, and revert to their primitive selves.

Clothes, too, played an important role in Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s life. Though he spent his early years living as something of a Westernized Indian, his work in social justice led to his “unlearning” of the Western culture that he had been cultivating for much of his life. Gandhi saw his wearing of clothing made in England and inspired by English cultures as something that actually de-civilized him, and on a larger scale, allowed for the British to occupy India. While Gandhi’s change of clothing from traditional British wear to a mere loincloth may seem trivial, an examination of his personal philosophy with respect to clothing leads to an interesting discussion on what it means to be (un)civilized.

**On Establishing Indian Independence: Swaraj & Swadeshi**

“There is a story that, on arriving in Britain after he had become famous, someone asked him the question: ‘Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of civilization in England?’ to which he replied ‘I think that it would be something worth trying!’” (Burke). While Gandhi grew to believe that Western civilization was hardly “civilized,” this was not an understanding he was born with. Like many of us, Gandhi began as someone who saw the need for Western clothing if he was to function in a Western world. However, Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa and India taught him otherwise; if these countries wanted their independence from England, they were going to have to create it for themselves. After all, “The English have not taken India; [the Indians] have given it to them” (Gandhi 38). Indian reliance on Western civilization has allowed the English to reign in a foreign land. Gandhi claimed that the Indians “keep the English in India for [their] base self-interest” and “to blame them [...] is to perpetuate their power” (40). In order for India to gain swaraj (self-reliance, independence, and ultimately, true freedom), the people first needed to attain personal swaraj. In order to do this, “it was necessary to adopt swadeshi—an idea which pre-dated Gandhi. Literally, the word “swadeshi” means pertaining to one’s own country and symbolizes self-reliance” (Sethia 94). If the Indians could come to a place where they were no longer reliant on the English, the English would no longer have an economic purpose for occupation – after all, “removal of the cause of the disease results in the removal of the disease itself. Similarly, if the cause of India’s slavery be removed, India can become free” (Gandhi 70).

While this background may seem unrelated to the lesson’s topic, seeing Gandhi’s understanding of swaraj and swadeshi are crucial to understanding his change in appearance and lifestyle. Over time, swadeshi came to mean “reliance on one’s own strength. Self-reliance for Gandhi meant relying on one’s body, mind, and, most importantly, on one’s soul. In this way swadeshi became the basis of satyagraha and an integral part of the vision of swaraj or freedom. It represented collective indigenous strength” (Sethia 95). Collective indigenous strength can only be realized if it is attainable for all – there is no collective strength when certain people are excluded. The only way to put everyone on an equal playing field is for everyone to have equal access and the ability to create both for themselves and the communal community. This goal of “collective indigenous strength” led to the symbol of India’s independence movement: the charkha and the creation of khadi.
Swadeshi: Establishing Economic Independence

As previously stated, the first step to attaining swaraj is to work towards creating a society of self-reliant individuals. By no longer working in commerce with the British, and instead creating villages of weavers at home, one large economic motivation for British occupation is eliminated. This has a second benefit – in “harming” the British economy, India offers itself an opportunity to build its own self-sustaining economy. Gandhi recommended the creation of “small-scale industries which would provide local people with employment and empower them” (Sethia 97). This adds yet another layer of benefit – the oppressed gain a sense of pride, accomplishment, and independence, all of which are necessary for each Indian if there is any hope of a nonviolent battle. Because the self-sustaining economy was so valuable on so many levels, it became a central tenet in Gandhi’s plan for attaining swaraj. To further symbolize that the Indians no longer wanted or required British goods, public meetings often included “the ritual of setting fire to a heap of foreign clothes surrendered by followers” (Sethia 134). Gandhi’s support of destruction of clothes which many impoverished Indians needed was cause for much debate. However, those who argue this are missing Gandhi’s point – Gandhi’s goal was to make every person a self-sufficient human being. They should not have to rely on anyone, foreign or domestic. To give them clothing would be to solve the symptom and not the disease; as the saying goes, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Gandhi saw foreign clothing as symbolizing “a visual display of wealth, craze for things foreign, a trend of modern civilization, and, most importantly, the economic domination of the colonial rulers. Burning the foreign clothes represented the rejection of such associations” (Sethia 135). Those clothes represented everything that Gandhi resented, and their destruction, too, was symbolic – it was telling the British that though they were impoverished, they were not going to rely on the English to get them out of that poverty – they were going to do it themselves. Gandhi knew that “what they needed was work to sustain their living. [...] He knew he] must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need, instead of giving them work which they sorely need” (Sethia 135).

Swaraj and the Renunciation of Western Culture

If Gandhi wanted his people to show self-sufficiency and to live on minimal means, then he certainly had to live this way himself (to his family’s dismay). However, Gandhi put swaraj first – both his own and his nation’s. For Gandhi, renunciation of luxury and modern goods and technology had additional benefits – it fostered empathy for people of all classes, created trust between him and his followers, and also freed him from the slavery that Western civilization imposed on him. Gandhi’s change in clothing, from the Western clothing to the loin cloth, actually symbolizes his becoming a more, not less, civilized human being. Gandhi, then, offers us an alternate definition of “true civilization”: “For Gandhi true civilization is one which elevates ethical and spiritual qualities among humans and leads them to “good conduct.” It promotes “mastery over our mind and passions” rather than the mastery of the world and control over nature (as was the case with modern civilization)” (Sethia 83). Gandhi sought a civilization characterized by kind behavior – by people recognizing the humanity in their neighbors, enemies, and all life. His civilization is characterized by self-control; a civilization where man has control of his passions, and does not allow anyone to take away that control. Gandhi looked at Indian civilization and saw that even before the British occupied their country, Indians were divided. However, he saw that “Indian civilization had a strong foundation, going back to ancient times, of moral principles of truth and nonviolence, which could be used for its
regeneration and revitalization, thus making it a “true” civilization. It is in this sense, he wanted Indians to visit their past, a civilization grounded in values” (Sethia 101). Gandhi’s wearing of the loin cloth reflected this desire to return to a “primitive” lifestyle.

Renouncing Western clothing freed Gandhi from a type of slavery he had been living under for decades: adherence to Western civilization made him a slave to desire and material wealth. However, his renunciation allowed him to take the focus off of himself and put it on others:

Renunciation redoubled his desire to work for the common welfare. Less carnal, he became less self-centered. By lifting himself above the material he freed himself to work more fully for his ideals. Greater control over self gave him greater control over others. To be sure, storms continued to rage within him, but now he could harness them for the generation of more public power. (Fischer 34)

Gandhi “frees himself” when he no longer wants or needs anything more than what he can create with his own two hands. The word choice of “free” is significant – we are all in slavery so long as we live dependent on material goods beyond our own control. Again, Gandhi showed his leadership through example. Here, he is showing how control of his desires leads to his own personal swaraj, which in turn allows him to help all his people, even those who feel the most powerless, reach national swaraj. It was these people, in fact, who inspired Gandhi to wear his loin-cloth:

I propose...to content myself with only a loin-cloth and a chaddar whenever found necessary for the protection of the body. I adopt the change because I have always hesitated to advise anything I may not myself be prepared to follow, also because I am anxious by leading the way to make it easy for those who cannot afford to change... (CWMG-V24:152)

While many of his supporters were shocked by this move, Gandhi saw it unfit to wear more clothing than what many millions of peasants could afford on their bodies. (Sethia 134)

Gandhi’s selfless dedication was vital to his success. It opened communication between a lawyer and “untouchables,” and it engendered trust where before there was only suspicion and oppression. Gandhi, as a leader, understood that financial status was irrelevant to humanity – we are all people, and can all live within the same means. As such, there is no reason for there to be financial disparity, and so anything he had, he gave.

*Khadi as a Tool for Promoting Empathy & Trust*

This freedom that renunciation gave him also gave him the ability to empathize with others, which in turn made him a much more effective tool for educating and helping those who needed it most. His renunciation was purposeful, and not just a means of self-deprivation: “‘A mother,’ he wrote in a letter, ‘would never by choice sleep in a wet bed but she would gladly do so in order to spare the dry bed for her child’” (Fischer 31). Perhaps this analogy further explains the nickname “Bapu” (father) that Gandhi acquired through his work. Gandhi took the role of a parent in his giving up of his own luxury for the benefit of his fellow man. What makes this so powerful is that in these powerful acts of unselfishness, “everyone experiences glorious moments of identification [...] with his fellows. A saint has many such moments when, instead of being preoccupied with his person, he forgets and transcends it and occupies a place inside others” (Fischer 31). What a beautiful thing. When one person stops focusing on himself, he can then “occupy a place inside others.” There is no better way to understand the need to help a fellow man than to see the world from his perspective.
Because empathy was so key to everything Gandhi believed in, there is no doubt that understanding the plight of the less fortunate was a major motivator in his deciding to wear a loin cloth and live as an ascetic. Gandhi taught that “to assist the underdog [...] you must understand him, and to understand him you must sometimes live as he does and work as he does” (Fischer 83). While his contemporaries were disgusted at the thought of working with “the untouchables,” Gandhi knew that their inclusion in the community was vital to the movement’s success. In wearing Western clothing and holding “modern jobs,” the intellectuals of the Indian independence movement risked the danger of separating themselves from the masses. Unity was key, and the best way to unite with your fellow man is to understand him, and the best way to do this is to live his life. Before Gandhi, there was a great divide between the Indian classes (in terms of the struggle for independence); but Gandhi showed that this divide was not a natural and necessary thing. At a speech for the Gandhi Memorial Center in Washington DC, Kamala writes about Gandhi’s ability to unite classes:

[Before there was a great divide.] Then came Gandhi, and a vast gulf was bridged. He identified with the people just as they were. For years people in the Western world wondered at his strange appearance (i.e. wearing a simple loincloth) thinking him oddly ascetic. But like all else he did, Gandhi even dressed deliberately, by principle. If the multitudes had little to wear, then he would share their plight, in empathy. His simple and truthful example coming from a committed faith in human nature awakened the conscience of broader society to the needs of the multitude. People became eager to join him in service. (Kamala)

Gandhi’s wearing of the loin cloth showed his humanity; his “committed faith” in human nature and the genuine reaction of others to his dedication showed the depth of his own humanity. Though on the surface it appears that Gandhi lost his connection to humanity when he renounced “traditional” clothing, further examination proves quite the opposite. Gandhi’s desire to empathize with everyone in India also led to his ability to establish trust, which was absolutely essential to the success of his cause. If Gandhi’s later tactic of fasting was to be effective, he must be a person that people both trust and want to prevent from suffering. This is no easy task, but Gandhi’s renunciation of personal desire allowed him to become this person. While “the untouchables” and other poor citizens were used to being taken advantage of and exploited, Gandhi’s voluntary poverty showed that this was not his desire. The poor “find it difficult to believe that anybody would give something for nothing. They have experienced too many situations in which the rich and mighty merely took. For this reason, once they are completely convinced of a person’s unselfishness, they deluge him with unbridled devotion and slavish obedience. That was Gandhi’s reward” (Fischer 34). What Gandhi lacked materially he gained spiritually and socially. The obedience he garnered was wholly unrelated to fear – it was pure devotion. There is little that is a more powerful creator of loyalty than this, and when it comes to revolution, loyalty is one of the most powerful weapons.

Conclusion

This entire discussion of Gandhi’s motivation for diminishing the amount of clothing he wears all serves to deconstruct the traditional view of civilized appearances. While modern readers see Western clothes as symbols of civilized life, Gandhi’s renunciation of this style showed his superior humanity. It allowed him to empathize with fellow Indians, create trust with them, and eventually overthrow an empire. In a letter Gandhi wrote to the Natal Advertiser on September 19, 1893, he responded to accusations that Indian traders were “unethical, uncivilized, and unsuitable for living in Natal and therefore undesirable” (Sethia 41).
Gandhi thoroughly rebuffed this ignorance, and posed a counterargument to the writer – what kind of “civilization” shows so much contempt for poor British subjects? Gandhi responded below:

...you say these wretched Asiatics live a semi-barbaric life. It would be highly interesting to learn your views of a semi-barbaric life. I have some notion of the life they live. If a room without a nice, rich carpet and ornamental hangings, a dinner table (perhaps unvarnished), without an expensive table-cloth, with no flowers to decorate it, with no wines spread, no pork or beef...be a semi-barbaric life; if a white comfortable dress, specially adapted to a warm climate, which, I am told, many Europeans envy them in the trying heat of summer, be a semi-barbaric life: if no beer, no tobacco, no ornamental walking stick, no golden watch chain, no luxuriously-fitted sitting-room, be a semi-barbaric life; if, in short, what one commonly understands by a simple frugal life be a semi-barbaric life, then, indeed, the Indian traders must plead guilty to the charge, and the sooner the semi-barbarity is wiped out from the highest colonial civilization, the better...

It seems, on the whole, that their simplicity, their total abstinence from intoxicants, their peaceful and, above all, their businesslike and frugal habits, which should serve as a recommendation, are really at the bottom of all this contempt and hatred of the poor Indian traders. And they are British subjects. Is this Christian-like, is this fair play, is this justice, is this civilization? (CWMG-V1:59-60). (Sethia 41)

Gandhi’s claims are hard to ignore, and force people to think critically before they judge. Living an ascetic lifestyle is not a sign of uncivilized behavior, but in fact it can be the opposite. It could be a sign that the person is choosing to live with more suffering so that someone else does not need to suffer. It could mean that the person is exhausted from living a life a slave to desire, and has feed himself from those chains by living solely on what he could create. And similarly, wealth is most certainly not a direct sign of civilization, and in fact, could be a sign of the opposite. The goal of the forthcoming lesson is to show this to students – to expose them to alternate definitions of civilized behavior, and to show them why some may choose to live in this manner.

“In the times to come the people will not judge us by the creed we profess or the label we wear or the slogans we shout but by our work, industry, sacrifice, honesty and purity of character”

~Gandhi (Kamala)

Bibliography


Teaching Activities

INSTRUCTION & PREPARATION

While reading *Lord of the Flies*, students will note that the characters’ clothing changes: the boys go from wearing Western clothes to that of “primitive” people – loin cloths. One group of boys, the choir boys (whose clothes are meant to represent their goodness), do this most obviously. William Golding takes care to point out that as the boys wear less “civilized” clothes, so too their behavior becomes less civilized. Questions like the following will be discussed:

* What does their discarding of clothes represent? How/why is it significant?
* How does the boys’ changing appearance affect them? Why does it affect them in this way?
* What do you think Golding was trying to show by placing so much emphasis on clothing? What point is he making?
* Jack decides to wear a mask in chapter 4. How does wearing this mask impact his behavior? Why?

For a more explicit discussion of this, teachers can use the accompanying handout, which offers quotations and questions related to clothing in LOTF. *This handout should be completed at home, the night before the planned lesson.*

This lesson can be completed anywhere AFTER students have read chapter 4!

LESSON DAY

1. Students will come to class with the handout completed, and so will come to class already having considered the significance of clothing in Golding’s novel. To get students thinking and sharing, students will pair up with a student near them to share thoughts about the homework (5-10 minutes)

2. Students will receive the content essay (or a variation thereof) to read as a class, clarifying anything necessary along the way. Alternatively, any writing that explains Gandhi’s thoughts on khadi can be used!

3. To set the stage for the lesson, tell the class what the objective is here. Give brief information about Gandhi – assume a level of no knowledge! He was a man largely responsible for the emancipation of India from British rule, and he did so peacefully! Introduce students to the idea of nonviolence – the idea of fighting for a cause without inflicting pain. More about how Gandhi achieved independence is shared within the content essay. Students should, however, be told basic background. (5 minutes)

4. Teacher should preread the content essay looking for vocabulary issues – preteach unique vocabulary, such as “swaraj.” (5 minutes)

5. Read through the content essay with the class, periodically stopping to check for comprehension and discuss. (30 minutes)
HOMEWORK
1. For homework, have students respond to the following questions in an online environment:
   a. What does it mean to be civilized? Consider Golding’s opinion, Gandhi’s, and your own!
   b. Is there any connection between Gandhi’s understanding of the significance of clothing and Golding’s, as evidenced in LOTF? Explain.
   c. Does “the clothing make the man”?
      i. How did Gandhi’s clothing reflect his character?
      ii. How do the characters in LOTF’s clothing reflect their character?
      iii. What is the relationship between the clothing and the man?
   d. How can understanding Gandhian philosophy help me understand William Golding’s Lord of the Flies in new ways?
2. Follow up with class discussion as needed/wanted!

**Link to first blog: [http://lotfandgandhi.blogspot.com/](http://lotfandgandhi.blogspot.com/)

Materials
* Content essay for students to learn Gandhian philosophy
* Clothing quotations from Lord of the Flies handout
CLOTHING QUOTES FROM LORD OF THE FLIES

For each of the following quotations, consider the following questions:

* What is the character wearing at this point?
* Is clothing acting as a symbol? Find out by thinking about how the character interacts with the clothes. Do they like them? Dislike them? Why?
* How do the clothes the character wears (or doesn’t wear) impact him?
* Does “the clothing make the man”? Explain.
* Do you see a relationship between clothing and civilized behavior?
* Is there anything else significant in the quote?

1. He became conscious of the weight of clothes, kicked his shoes off fiercely and ripped off each stocking with its elastic garter in a single movement. Then he leapt back on the terrace, pulled off his shirt, and stood there among the skull-like coconuts with green shadows from the palms and the forest sliding over his skin. He undid the snake-clasp of his belt, lugged off his shorts and pants, and stood there naked, looking at the dazzling beach and the water.

2. He trotted through the sand, enduring the sun’s enmity, crossed the platform and found his scattered clothes. To put on a grey shirt once more was strangely pleasing.

3. Then the creature [Jack] stepped from mirage on to clear sand, and they saw that the darkness was not all shadow but mostly clothing.

4. The afternoon sun slanted in from the other side of the platform and most of the children, feeling too late the smart of sunburn, had put their clothes on. The choir, less of a group, had discarded their cloaks.

5. A sharpened stick about five feet long trailed from his right hand, and except for a pair of tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt he was naked. He closed his eyes, raised his head and breathed in gently with flared nostrils, assessing the current of warm air for information. The forest and he were very still.

6. Ralph looked them over. They were dirty, not with the spectacular dirt of boys who have fallen into mud or been brought down hard on a rainy day. Not one of them was an obvious subject for a shower, and yet—hair, much too long, tangled here and there, knotted round a dead leaf or a twig; faces cleaned fairly well by the process of eating and sweating but marked in the less accessible angles with a kind of shadow; clothes, worn away, stiff like his own with sweat, put on, not for decorum or comfort but out of custom; the skin of the body, scurfy with brine—

7. Jack signaled the rest of the hunt to be quiet and went forward by himself. He was happy and wore the damp darkness of the forest like his old clothes.

8. Two figures rushed at the fire and he prepared to defend himself but they grabbed half-burnt branches and raced away along the beach. The three others stood still, watching Ralph; and he saw that the tallest of them, stark naked save for paint and a belt, was Jack.

9. The chief was sitting there, naked to the waist, his face blocked out in white and red. The tribe lay in a semicircle before him. The newly beaten and untied Wilfred was sniffing noisily in the background. Roger squatted with the rest.

Finally, do you see any patterns? Can you figure out what Golding was doing with the clothing motif? What message is he trying to communicate?