## Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Lesson:</th>
<th>Gandhi’s Alternate View of Women: Changing the Face of Modern Media &amp; Advertising</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson By:</td>
<td>Michael Irwin, Chapel Hill High School; Chapel Hill, NC</td>
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<td>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</td>
<td>Class Size:</td>
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<tr>
<td>English II- World Literature</td>
<td>10-30</td>
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## Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
- Students will define and practice the use of key vocabulary words for the study of oppression.
- Students will view the film *Killing Us Softly* and identify 5 methods that are used to objectify women in the media.
- Students will view the film *Tough Guise* and identify 5 ways that media perpetuates a negative portrayal of masculinity.
- Students will evaluate various forms of media and be able to identify the inherent violence and/or stereotypes that it endorses.
- Students will evaluate Gandhi’s view of women.
- Students will write a letter to a media or advertising agency outlining the harmful effects of their use of objectification and/or stereotypes on society.

## Lesson Abstract:
The purpose of this lesson is to teach 30 tenth graders with an emphasis in World Literature about the violence of media- specifically advertising- on women. Students will learn to evaluate and critique the stereotypes and messages that are portrayed of both men and women in the media, and how those prescribed gender roles contribute to violence in our society. Ultimately, students will write a letter to Gandhi in which they discuss the implications of his alternate view of women in a modern context.

## Lesson Content:
Gandhi believed that civilizations, at their moral height, embrace all members on equal ground. In his renowned text *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi encourages the rule of self as a prelude for Indian independence. He catalogues his views on a number of different facets of society. In regard to women, Gandhi asserts the following:

> “Woman must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service.”

> “Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand.”

> “Woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his.”

> “Women are in the position somewhat of the slave of old who did not know that he could or ever had to be free.”

> “Women have been taught to regard themselves as slaves of men.”
Additionally, from The Legacy of Bapu, author Rajmohan Gandhi outlines the following on Gandhi’s view on the value of female children:

Three months before he died he said to a woman who had sought his blessings for a son born after three daughters:

“Should a woman like you make a distinction between a son and a daughter? Can even a wise woman like you have such an antipathy towards womankind? Of course all your children have my blessings.”

Gandhi’s genuine view of women can be looked at as the antithesis of American media and advertising’s portrayal of women. While the media strives to marginalize, oppress, and demoralize women, Gandhi strives to raise their awareness of self and include their participation and voice in a free society. As we assess the degrees of violence that media and advertising employ today, it is imperative that we look to Gandhi’s alternative view of how women can and should be enrolled in the full production of society.

According to media researcher Jean Kilbourne, the average American sees over 3,000 media ads per day. This astronomically large figure of advertising is sure to have a very conscious and unconscious effect on both adults and children. Additionally, if we take a closer look at the treatment of men and women in advertising and media as a whole, we can see how they are both treated in a fashion that reinforces sexist stereotypes and facilitates the perpetuation of violence towards women in society.

Women are constantly being bombarded with messages of how imperative it is to be thin. Whether it is implied through the sex appeal of a thin model advertising a product or a magazine cover advocating for “the perfect body”, women are taught that the right way to look is to be abnormally skinny (if not emaciated). Statistics illustrate the disparity clearly: while the average woman in America is 5’4” tall and weighs 140 pounds, the average American model is 5’11” and weighs 117 pounds. If women do not meet this standard, the message is that they should diet, take medication, or even arrange surgical procedures to fix the “problems”.

Clearly, advertising consistently endorses a false representation of the female gender. This abstraction is enhanced through the computer techniques of airbrushing photographs to clear up any blemishes and generating models from graphics as opposed to real people.

There are many different methods that are used to objectify women in the media. One common technique is to constantly show them in very sexually provocative positions, regardless of the product that is being advertised. For instance, Skechers, a shoe company, regularly employs the image of Christina Aguilera in skimpy outfits to sell shoes. Beer ads have used the image of “sexy” women since the incipience of beer advertising. The use of women’s bodies to sell products is as old as advertising itself. Companies have even taken objectification to a new level with computer graphics, creating images of women’s bodies in the shape of the actual product itself. Another common method of objectification is dismemberment, thus reducing a woman’s whole, true self to a set of breasts or a pair of legs. Many ads will even go so far as sexualizing violence, suggesting that it is profitable, acceptable, or downright enjoyable for women to be placed in violent situations. All of these methods serve to dehumanize women by reducing their worth.

Not only do media ads reinforce the notion that women are material objects who should look
sexy, but males are often encouraged to be the agents for violence against women. Men, as the
ads depict, should be strong and muscular while rarely showing any sign of emotion.
Mainstream music, movies, television, and advertising work in synchronicity to endorse, just
like the perfect woman, the perfect man to rule over her. It is no wonder that sexual assault and
domestic violence statistics are at unbelievable heights. Even conservative statistical sources
are consistent in the assertion that an average of one out of four women will be sexually
assaulted while at college. As we consider the true meaning of democracy, its future can only
be viewed in its guarantee to all people.

North Carolina English Standards:
- (3.01) examine controversial issues.
- (3.04, 5.03) identify and analyze personal, social, historical or cultural influences,
  contexts, or biases.
- (5.01) make comparisons and connections between historical and contemporary issues
  [and] understand the importance of cultural and historical impact on literary texts.

Guiding Questions:
- What are the different ways that advertising portrays women and men?
- What are the harmful effects of advertising on women and men?
- Should constitutional rights be waived for the prevention of violence?
- How can we use writing as a medium for social change?
- What is Gandhi’s view of women? How can we apply this view to a modern context?

Materials Needed:
- LCD projector connected to computer for movie projection
- Speakers
- Current popular magazines- encourage students to bring them in, or check local
  recycling bins.
- Large sheets of blank paper
- Glue
- Markers

Lesson Context:
This lesson can be used within any unit that explores the stereotypes of men and women, how
advertising and media affects gender roles, the prevalence of violence toward women, and/or
the perpetuation of a masculine war culture. This particular lesson will work very well as a
contemporary connection to the study of violence towards women in Chinua Achebe’s Things
Fall Apart.

Teaching Activities:

Vocabulary of the Oppressed: (60 minutes)
Divide the class into 11 groups and give each group one of the following words. For
homework, instruct students to use any electronic or print sources available to find out
information that can be helpful in defining the respective term. In class the following day, have
students meet in their groups, discuss their findings with each other, and collaborate on a creative way to teach the term to the class. Offer students giant pieces of paper and markers to create visual aids, or allot them time to create a skit that teaches the basic definition and tenants of the concept. As groups are presenting, other students should actively take notes on the terms and define them in their own words. Promote the use of the vocabulary of the oppressed over the course of the unit and year.

Oppress
Exploit
Incarcerate
Objectify
Marginalize
Victimize
Empower
Sexualize
Commercialize
Derogatory
Alienate

Brainstorm Writing exercise: Defining Violence (60-75 minutes)
Directions: Tell students that they will be using all of the ideas that they can come up with about violence and how it is spread to create an organized group paragraph. Explain the difference between connotation and denotation and encourage students to use both in the process. Students should be in groups of 4-6, depending on class size, and seated in desks in a close circle.

Deliver the instructions one step at a time:
1. **Brainstorming:** Every student should have his or her own sheet of paper. When the activity begins, students should write down any definition, personal experience, memory, or historical example that relates to violence. Instruct students that they need to write in complete sentences and that phrases or words will not suffice. Once a student has finished a statement, she/he should place it in the middle of the circle and take a new paper from another student. After reading the comment on the paper, which may or may not generate a new idea or memory in the reader, the student should write another idea about violence. Again, the student should place the paper in the middle, grab a new one, read the comments, and write a new idea. This process should repeat itself for approximately 8 minutes until the pages are relatively full of ideas. Note: Inform students that the whole idea behind swapping pages and reading comments is to allow other people’s ideas to call upon ideas in their minds that they might not have thought about unless they were prodded.

2. **Selecting and sharing comments:** Instruct students to get their original paper back, read all the comments, and circle the one that has the most substance and carries a strong impression. This does not have to be the longest idea on the page, but rather the comment that the individual student relates to the most. One at a time, students should go around the circle, read the comment, and explain why they selected that particular statement. Students should also inquire as to who wrote the statement and if they have anything else to add about its importance.

3. **Writing an organized Paragraph:** Instruct students that they are to work together to create an organized paragraph using all of the circled statements. You can steer them in the right
direction as much as necessary- some students will need to be told more explicitly to figure out what the comments have in common, how to decide upon an order of statements, etc. Inform students that they can add new sentences and minimally change a few words in circled statements, but that they must keep the validity of the statement intact. Since this portion of the exercise focuses on organized writing, teachers may want to review the importance of topic sentences and transitions. Ultimately, the goal should be to get students to write a highly organized paragraph with sound structure, not just a string of circled statements. Encourage students to edit final products for organization and grammar.

4. Large group sharing: Have one representative from each group read their paper to the larger group. The teacher (or student representative) should write down bullet points on the board that includes all the aspects of violence that are discussed. Feedback can be given by the teacher or solicited from the students on the effectiveness of paragraph organization and depth of ideas.

5. Additions, omission, or revisions: Ask students if they have any feedback about the various definitions and examples of violence and how it is spread. Encourage them to add anything to the list that they see as pertinent to its complete definition. Leave the bullet points on the board as a working definition. It may become necessary to repeat this step of the process throughout the next few activities.

**Digital Story: The Portrayal of Women in Media:** (45 minutes)
Watch the iMovie film as an introductory lesson. Ask students to watch the clips carefully and to try to come up with opinions on the last question that is posed in the digital story- is there a connection between how the media portrays women and the high rates of violence that they are subjected to? Conduct a class discussion with student responses.

**Media Literacy: Killing us Softly and Tough Guise** (90 minutes viewing, 50 minute discussion)
View the films *Killing us Softly* and *Tough Guise*. Have students take notes on the various methods that are used in media and advertising to perpetuate objectification and violence in society. Conduct a discussion on the films by asking students which aspects were most impressionable/moving.

**Group Activity: Analyzing ads in popular magazines** (45 minutes of constructing visuals, 60 minutes of presentation and discussion)
Using a wide variety of popular magazines, have students cut out ads that employ one or more of the methods of objectification or gender stereotyping that have been identified in class discussion or the aforementioned films. Have students cut out ads, glue them to big pieces of paper, and label the forms of violence. All students should share responses with the large group. Specific attention to be paid to the assessments that students do not fully agree upon.

**Class Discussion: Gandhi’s treatment of women** (45-60 minutes completing chart with discussion, 45-60 minutes writing a letter to Gandhi)
Conduct a class discussion on Gandhi’s views on women from the aforementioned quotes. Based on class findings, encourage students to consider how Gandhi would respond to the treatment of both men and women. What does our society ultimately lose through media and advertising? Share the aforementioned quotes from the content section and complete the
following table on the board with an active discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUOTE FROM GANDHI ABOUT THE ROLE/ SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN</th>
<th>Explain in detail how we see/ don’t see the significance of the quote being played out in today’s world</th>
<th>What specific steps can we actively take to create/avoid the implications of the quote?</th>
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**Raising our voice: Writing an Imaginary Letter to Gandhi**
Now that students have a greater understanding of Gandhi and the implications his views have on women in a modern day, instruct students to show their comprehension of these issues in a 2 page imaginary letter addressed to Gandhi. Students should incorporate information from the chart above and their own personal understanding of the issues in the following format:

- Address Gandhi
- State which elements and principles on his view of women were impressionable to you.
- Give an update of the challenges that women face today-- essentially, update Gandhi on the modern problems of women.
- Propose ways that you believe Gandhi’s philosophical view of women could be applied to modern day women.
- Ask Gandhi a key question that you would need answered in order to bring about more understanding of the issues.

**Raising Your Voice: Writing Media and Advertising Agencies**
Instruct students to choose one of the products or sources of media that they feel has exceedingly incorporated violence in their marketing methods. Encourage students to incorporate their knowledge of Gandhi in a letter to the company outlining their grievances.
Students should adhere to the following guidelines and send the letters upon completion:

- Use professional business letter formatting
- Be organized and clear in outlining the methods of objectification/violence used in the advertising
- Write with a formal voice as opposed to an angry tone.
- Clearly outline the advantages to changing the advertising methods to incorporate a more nonviolent approach to the portrayal of females and males in society.
- Request a written response to your issues in a timely manner.

**Assessment/Evaluation:**
Students should be given a grade based on a combination of successful participation and adherence to writing standards prescribed by the individual teacher. All writing rubrics should be created and individual responses subsequently computed in relation to the aforementioned formats for responses.

**Extension Activities/Enrichment:**

- Contact a member of a local Rape Crisis Center to come speak to the class about dating violence and sexual assault.

- Discussing the pertinence of global women’s oppression, have students read the graphic novels *Perspolis* I and II (set in Iran) and create a graphic novel of their own that recounts the struggles of women in a modern context relevant to their own culture. Use the following texts:


- Have students investigate Gandhi’s views on celibacy. Discuss the manner in which Gandhi used the abstinence from sexual desire as a means to give women more voice within his ashrams. How did this go against the normative standards of typical Hindu celibacy vows of his day? Use the following article:


- View the film *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes* and continue these themes by exploring how the hip-hop industry perpetuates deep styles of manhood that serve to glamorize sexism, violence, and homophobia. Use the following film:


- Have students create a collage in the community celebrating the lives of women.

The following websites offer great resources on media literacy:

- [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)
- [www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org)
Bibliography:


