Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Violence in History and the Alternative of Nonviolence
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5-8th grade, Social Studies
Duration of Lesson: 60 minutes, 3-5 days

Lesson Abstract: A narrative of violence riddles our U.S. social studies curriculum. In this lesson students investigate the example Gandhi set for others to not engage in violence when oppressed. We will explore the alternative and effectiveness of nonviolence as an alternative, and specifically look at the example of Gandhi’s Salt March. Students will then be able to apply and demonstrate this concept of nonviolence to their own life.

Guiding Questions:
- What are the alternatives to war and violence?
- What is Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha?
- How did Gandhi demonstrate or use the principles of nonviolence in the Salt March?
- How can students apply the principles of nonviolence and satyagraha to their lives?

Relevant State/National Standards:
1.0 Listening and Speaking Strategies:
  1.8 Analyze media as sources for information, entertainment, persuasion, interpretation of events, and transmission of culture.
  1.4 Select a focus, organizational structure, and point of view for an oral presentation.
  1.5 Clarify and support spoken ideas with evidence and examples.
  1.6 Engage the audience with appropriate verbal cues, facial expressions, and gestures.

Content Essay:
Students often encounter acts of physical and verbal violence daily in our schools and society. Violence infiltrates our televisions, video games, and computer screens. It is propagated by images of war in the world, and a focus on conflict and bloodshed in our social studies textbooks as a way of telling history. Because of this societal conditioning, when students are confronted with confrontation, their reflex reaction is to react with violence. As educators, we need to teach students there is an effective and moral alternative to violence through examples in history and practical examples. In this lesson students will be exposed to Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha, and how they can apply it to their own lives.

Satyagraha
Gandhi’s belief in passive resistance was formed early in his life when he encountered discrimination in South Africa as a new lawyer. To him passive resistance was a method
of securing rights by personal suffering; it was the reverse of resistance by arms (HS pg. 88) He pursued securing rights for Indians in South America using “passive resistance”. But after a while, he searched for a better term for this movement that would embody the spirit the movement requiring moral courage, or “soul force.” He decided on the term satyagraha, which literally means “holding the truth”, to replace the “passive resistance” movement in South Africa.

“Men of great physical strength are rare. Rarer still must be those who derive their strength from the truth. – Gandhi, Indian Opinion

Gandhi believed that satyagraha was not weak, but in fact the weapon of the strong. (Sethia) Gandhi infused two main ideas into this concept, being that of satya (truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence). These fundamental concepts can be found in the world’s major religious and philosophical traditions. Intertwining these two together translated into “truth force,” and manifested itself into action in describing his basis of nonviolent resistance. This was the underlying belief’s that brought force to Gandhi’s social reform movement. Satyagraha was rooted in a person’s inner strength, not physical strength. Instead of physical force, his movement confronts injustices through an appeal to human conscience, and so the satyagrahi tries attempts to remove injustice without hurting the people behind it, and instigate the moral good in transforming his opponents. Change that established a foundation for lasting good and not just short-term change was a goal, which could only be accomplished through nonviolence. If there were occasions of violence that erupted in Gandhi’s satyagraha movement, he would call it off immediately, because he felt they needed to follow these strict guidelines to be successful and contain the correct intent.

“If I do not obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.” –Gandhi, Hind Swaraj

A satyagrahi must be willing to be truly fearless. Although he does not have a desire to die, he must be prepared and have a readiness to. In this sense, the fear of death has been overcome, and is ready to suffer for the greater cause. Other character traits a satyagraha must strive to have is not to use words that are hurtful or rude. Also, one who practices this must try to feel no anger or show any violence to their oppressor- even when assaulted. This resistance tries to bring into focus the moral injustices done. It also presumes that both the oppressor and the oppressed are both victims in an unjust system. Satyagraha can be best practiced through non-cooperation with careful preparation by the masses. It can mean individuals and groups withdrawing support from various public institutions.

Salt March

“The illegality is in a Government that steals the people’s salt and makes them pay heavily for the stolen article. The people, when they become conscious of their power, will have every right to take possession of what belongs to them.”
– Gandhi on the Salt March
The salt tax imposed on India by Britain had been a concern very early on for Gandhi, back to early 1900’s and made a reference it in Hind Swaraj in 1909. The Salt Tax essentially made it illegal to sell or produce salt. Since salt is necessary in everyone's daily diet, everyone in India was affected. The Salt Tax made it illegal for workers to freely collect their own salt from the coasts of India, making them buy salt they couldn't really afford. In 1930, he announced the salt satyagraha and nonviolent march to protest this unfair tax on the people of India and Britain’s monopoly of it.

Before embarking on this 240 mile march from Sabarmati to Dandi, be sent a letter to the Viceroy, making him aware of their intent to proceed with civil disobedience, with full disclosure and transparency. This march began on March 12, 1930 beginning with 78 male satygrahis and lasted for 23 days, with more and more people joining the march along the way to the coast. On April 5, Gandhi and the satyagrahis reached the coast, and Gandhi picked up a lump of salt, breaking the law. The satyagrahis followed his passive defiance, and soon people were doing this everywhere along the coast. About a month later, Gandhi was arrested and put into prison, already filled with protestors.

Soon after, a march to the Dharshana Salt Works resulted in violence where non-violent satyagrahis didn’t defend themselves against the blows of clubs of policeman. Many were killed and even more terribly injured. This was the beginning of the world embracing the satyagrahis and their non-violent revolution, starting to expose the cruelty of an oppressive British regime. After this march, the British government did not lift the salt tax, but it infused the Indians with a great sense of pride, confidence and it demonstrated the power of nonviolent civil disobedience, and the moral force of satyagraha.

In this lesson, after students are exposed to the meaning of satyagraha, they will be able to see it come alive in the context of the Salt March. Students will be able to use this concept of satyagraha to apply to their own lives and in situations that might arise. They will be more aware of nonviolence as an alternative, the effectiveness of it, and have the tools to better put it into practice.

**Bibliography:**


**Teaching Activities:**
1) First, discuss ways the social studies curriculum focuses our country’s history in terms of violence and war. Ask students, “Instead of engaging in battles and bloodshed, which causes death, what are some alternatives to violence?”
2) Have a discussion with students about peace organizations, such as the United Nations around the fact that attempting to negotiate, communicate, and compromising should be the first steps in avoiding war. But what about when these things are not working, and people are still being oppressed? Use the example of the plight of the Indians while the British were ruling them, and the oppression they faced.

3) Next, engage students in a study of Gandhi’s vision of satyagraha and nonviolence. Students will research this, and make posters encompassing beliefs and character traits that this concept upholds.

4) Together, read an article that summarizes the Salt March, such as the example below, to give students background on this peaceful civil disobedience protest. [http://history.howstuffworks.com/asian-history/salt-march2.htm](http://history.howstuffworks.com/asian-history/salt-march2.htm)

Then for this to come alive, students will watch the documentary, “Salt March.”

5) Discuss the importance and impact this march had, and how the Indian’s nonviolence was effective and why it was effective.

6) Finally, students will connect how they can react in nonviolent ways in their life when confronted with oppression, put-downs, or violent acts. We will discuss examples. Assign students a writing assignment in which they will write about what they have learned from Gandhi’s Salt March, and how they can apply the concepts of satyagraha and nonviolence in their own daily lives when confronted with conflicts.

**Materials:**
-Salt March Documentary
-Poster Paper