Title of Lesson: The Power of Our Words: Using Language that Promotes Nonviolence

Lesson By: Alison Kennedy

<table>
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<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
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<td>K-2</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>1 week- Main introduction, but revisited throughout the year.</td>
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Guiding Questions:
- How can we solve problems with nonviolent words?
- What can we learn from Gandhi about how to talk when we have a problem?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson deals with giving very young students the language to solve conflicts that arise in the classroom or social settings in a nonviolent matter. It gives the students a bank of nonviolent phrases that they can use to practice this form of problem solving, while allowing them the opportunity to grow and find their own ways of doing this.

Lesson Content:
Many students today, come from a culture of violence. As society becomes progressively more violent, not only in its actions but also its discourse, children lose their models of solving conflict in a nonviolent way. This lesson aims to help very young children to begin to understand nonviolent conflict resolution through language. By giving students not only a vocabulary of nonviolent language, but having them begin to create their own tools to find that language, it not only empowers them, but nurtures an understanding in them that conflict can be solved by nonviolent means.

Mohandas K. Gandhi was an Indian leader, who in his lifetime, showed that conflicts, even large ones, have the ability to be resolved using nonviolent means. He came from a fairly ordinary background, but with incredible thoughtfulness, and self-discipline he was able to lead the Indian people, first to acquire rights in South Africa, and second, to eventually achieve freedom from British Rule in their own country. Gandhi has served as a role model for many nonviolent activists and movements. He was a huge influence on Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement. Mohandas Gandhi understood the power of words. He spoke of being shy as a blessing because it caused him to choose his words thoughtfully. “…beyond occasionally exposing me to laughter, my constitutional shyness has been no disadvantage…it’s greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have a naturally forced habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself the certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escapes my tongue or pen.” (Gandhi, p. 62) In Gandhi’s message of ahimsa (nonviolence) He stresses the importance of being aware of following ahimsa in every aspect of your life. He emphasizes that self-discipline and thoughtfulness are things that need to be ever present in ahimsa. Related to ahimsa was actively working for
nonviolence through something Gandhi termed satyagraha (which is active nonviolence or the soul force, working through the power or strength of love or the soul). Gandhi’s belief was that in satyagraha, one attempted to win an opponent over rather than dominate them. He wanted mutual respect to be present in negotiations with all parties involved, looking to compromise, so that all that were involved would be satisfied. This type of negotiation would require self-discipline and thoughtfulness at all times. It is this type of conflict resolution that this lesson will guide students towards developing.

According to Gandhi, civilization needs to support a culture of nonviolence. He believed for humanity to persevere, this philosophy of thought being put into practice was necessary. For Gandhi it was very clear- only nonviolence can replace warfare: “ I can say with confidence that the world is to have peace, nonviolence is the means to that end and no other”. (Nagler p.201) We currently live in a culture where this type of thinking is not supported. This makes it very difficult to live practicing the way of nonviolence. At an age where students are so rapidly developing language, they need a new vocabulary to open up this way of thinking. Gandhi practiced ahimsa in every aspect of his life. Actively and thoughtfully aligning his thoughts, words and actions to satyagraha. With very young children it makes sense to focus on the empathetic aspect of satyagraha. “Satyagraha assumes a constant beneficent interaction between contestants with a view on their ultimate reconciliation.”(Fischer, p.35) Students can learn to use language that promotes this concept when they have a conflict. Students learn to focus on explaining how they felt, rather than putting the blame on others. Allowing all parties involved an equal chance to be heard and having the students practice listening when others are talking are some simple, guided first steps. Practicing saying simple words like “I’m sorry”, “I forgive you”, “That’s ok”, or “ I made a mistake” makes it easier and easier to use these words. Students can also practice telling people calmly what they would like, such as “ I would like a turn on the swing”, as nonviolence does not mean you don’t work for what you want. It just means that you work for what you want, keeping in mind the needs of others. Teaching students this type of simple language will not only help them to figure out ways to work out problems effectively, but also help them to prevent those misunderstandings to begin with. It is also important to speak about conflict outside of the experience of it. Have class discussions about hypothetical situations that the students can dramatize to practice nonviolent resolution. It would also make sense to use these discussion times to speak generally about bullying, why it happens, ways it is done and how both the victims and the bullies feel. It is important to give the students a chance to process these types of situations in a place that is not emotionally charged. This will allow them to look at these situations in a more impersonal way and allow them to be more objective in their response. It also allows students to revisit this objective response when they are having conflicts that they are taking personally.

Gandhi understood the danger of arguing, as he said of the British hold on India “ We strengthen their hold by quarreling amongst ourselves.”(Gandhi, Parel ed. p.28) Gandhi was not however, condemning the British for ruling over India. He gave India equal responsibility and criticized the way in which Indians wanted to regain their independence, saying “ You want the tiger’s nature without the tiger”. (Gandhi, Parel p.28) Gandhi was encouraging India to transform the way it viewed and worked out this struggle.

Likewise, students can learn to approach the conflicts they face in an equally empowering way,
but one that creates satisfaction for all parties involved. Teachers need to allow students a safe forum to admit when they have made mistakes. Teaching that they can admit wrongdoings in an empowering way (with phrases such as “I would like to take responsibility for…” and giving them a safe place to do this, can be incredibly powerful in conflict resolution. Through talking and using nonviolent language, students may find conflicts have new meaning and will move more toward the Gandhian philosophy of not them versus us or me versus you, but everyone working together to find a solution. “Martin Luther King… and many nonviolent activists before and after… have said. Real nonviolence comes from each of us, from within ourselves. We have to do something about our thoughts, our speech, and our outer behavior to have a nonviolent effect on the world” (Nagler, p. 202)

As students practice and develop their nonviolent vocabulary in conflict resolution, encourage them to recognize this type of dialogue when they hear it and share it. Students can begin acknowledging each other for resolving things peacefully on their own. As they do this, students will not only feel more comfortable using the vocabulary you have modeled, but begin to develop their own.

**Massachusetts State Content Standards:**

| K.L.2.1: | By the end of grade 2, students will contribute knowledge to class discussion in order to develop a topic for a class project. |
| K.L.4.1: | Students will identify and sort common words into various classifications (*colors, shapes, textures*). |
| K.L.4.2: | Students will describe common objects and events in general and specific language. |

**Materials Needed:**

- Poster of nonviolent phrases
- Talking turns object.
- Awards for students who act in a nonviolent manner independently.

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

- Create a Poster of nonviolent words or phrases (such as I feel ____________ when you ____________

- Dramatize different playground scenarios in which nonviolent language can be practiced.

- Define bullying and have a class discussion about how to confront a bully.

- Read picture books that deal with conflict being resolved using nonviolent vocabulary.
Bibliography:


Nagler, Michael, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, New World Library, 2004