Title of Lesson: The Power of Our Stories
Lesson By: Alison Kennedy

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<tr>
<th>Grade Level/Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>1 week</td>
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Guiding Questions:
- What is the difference between violence and nonviolence?
- How do our stories help us understand violence and nonviolence?
- Why are our stories important when we try to create peace?

Lesson Abstract:
In this lesson students learn to develop their storytelling by telling stories from their lives that illustrate the concepts of violence and nonviolence. Students will use stories to begin to recognize the contrast the two ways of interacting. They will also begin to understand how nonviolence (actively making choices that are peaceful) is different from non-violence (the absence of violence). By sharing their stories and examining the situations in their and others’ lives, students will begin to understand these concepts and recognize them in the many forms they take.

Lesson Content:

Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. have many stories in their lives that show how violence affected them and nonviolence empowered them. Mohandas K. Gandhi was an Indian leader at the early part of the twentieth century. Although he never had an official political title he successfully won his people civil rights in South Africa and then lead his country to independence through British rule. He achieved all of this through nonviolent resistance. Martin Luther King Jr. was a prominent leader in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. He helped win civil rights for African Americans using the nonviolent resistance. He was inspired by Mohandas K. Gandhi and used his example to help lead him during the struggle to win equality for his people. Both of these men came from places where violent injustices were being used to suppress them and their people, and they chose and were empowered in the way of nonviolence.

Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King both used storytelling as a medium to explain their belief systems and their journeys to those belief systems. Because of this, and the fact that stories are so powerful for children, this lesson focuses on using the art of storytelling to help students with their understanding of violence and nonviolence. Through thinking about their own lives and hearing the stories of others, they will begin to be able to distinguish between violence and nonviolence. They will also begin to notice the difference between nonviolence (being actively and consciously nonviolent) and non-violence (the absence of violence). A good example of the difference between the two concepts, is given by Michael Nagler in his book *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*.

He tells of two Nobel Peace Prize winners who were given the award. Mother Theresa was given the award for her work in Calcutta. Here she literally “lif[ed] the human image out of the gutter.” (Nagler, p.199) This is positive peace. A few years later Menachem
Begin, the prime minister of Israel was awarded the same prize, but for a very different reason. He had “signed a “peace” agreement with... Egypt... that had temporarily slow[ed] the hostilities between Israel and Egypt.” (Nagler, p. 200)

This shows negative peace, simply the lessening of violence. The difference between the two is “a standoff characterized by the absence of physical war and an island of loving community nourished by the presence of spontaneous mutual concern.” (Nagler, p.200)

Gandhi and King were both influenced by the writings of many people on their journeys to nonviolence. They both spent a great deal of time studying the philosophy of other people as well as listening to other’s stories to hear different points of view. The experiences of other people were a crucial part of the development of their ideas in nonviolence. Gandhi developed his idea of Ahimsa (nonviolence) through the use of satyagraha (soulforce) (Fischer, p. 35).

Satyagraha is the philosophy of nonviolence that Mohandas Gandhi developed. In his quest for nonviolence he began to realize that the methods he was using were not passive resistance, as they were originally called. He developed his philosophy of satyagraha, which is the power that comes from love and truth. His goal was to actively work towards an understanding between oppressor and the oppressed. His philosophy requires incredible self-discipline. To be a satyagrahi, one must work toward truth and love for all things. One must work toward being consistent in thought and deed, and these must be without violence, but rather for a higher purpose. Gandhi eventually came to believe that active nonviolence (through satyagraha) was the only way to create real change. King was influenced by Gandhi’s ideas and used them to develop his idea of The Beloved Community. The Beloved Community was what King called what would come from a successful nonviolent movement. There would be no resentments or oppression between the groups involved, but rather understanding and harmony.

Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. learned from philosophers like Thoreau and Tolstoy, but they were also highly influenced by the people around them, their friends and family. They both tell the stories of their paths in nonviolence by explaining how individuals influenced them, but also by telling their own anecdotes.

Gandhi explained, through two very specific stories, how he finally reached a crossroads that lead him to the way of Ahimsa. First, he tells of when he was turned out and dismissed by an Englishmen he had considered a close colleague when studying in London. In this story he is shocked by the blatant racism the man exhibits when he comes to his office. His former colleague refused to see him or even acknowledge him personally. He is deeply affected by this experience, but is rendered helpless by his shock and fear. In the second story he is thrown off of a train in South Africa because he refuses to give up his seat because it make a white man uncomfortable that he is sitting in first class. He is asked to sit in the back with the luggage and other ‘colored’ people but refuses to do it. In this story he realizes how to combat this racism when he is thrown off the train. Here, he experiences the violence of racism once again, but now uses the experience to test his resolve and protest “nonviolently in his own way.”

Martin Luther King Jr. tells of how he learned of Mohandas Gandhi during a sermon in Philadelphia. “Dr. Johnson had just returned from India, and, to my great interest, he spoke of
the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi’s life and works.”

Through his readings of Mohandas Gandhi’s life and philosophy of satyagraha, Dr. King began to truly believe in nonviolence as a powerful force during conflict. He also began to believe that this method would not only be effective with individual conflict, but with conflict between nations and races as well. When Rosa Parks was arrested for her refusal to stand on the bus and the Montgomery Bus Boycott began, Dr. King was able to see his belief in nonviolent resistance at work.

Both of these leaders in nonviolence recalled powerful stories from their own childhoods that helped form their later convictions. These stories would be particularly meaningful to young children.

Gandhi wrote about the power of story in his own life. As a child who was not an exemplary student, he often dreaded his studies and never read or wrote beyond the assigned work. When he discovered the story of Harishchandra, however, he became transfixed. Harishchandra tells the story of a man who followed the path of truth no matter what hardships befell him. Gandhi explains the powerful message this story held for him about truth and how it’s power over him compelled him to carry the book with him and pour over it. “To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harischandra went through was the one ideal it inspired me.”(Gandhi, p. 7)

Students can understand what types of stories are appropriate and how to frame their storytelling through modeling and examples. Stories from teachers own lives are not only useful for students to understand what is expected of them, but are also fascinating to students as a window into their teachers lives.

As you give students small examples of stories that show violent and nonviolent interactions, remember that violence does not need to be physical. It can show itself in the forms of name-calling or exclusion. As students are able to distinguish these situations as violent or nonviolent in the stories you present, they will get more adept at producing examples of the different comparative stories from their own lives.

There are many stories in children’s literature that tell stories of conflict being resolved both violently and nonviolently. These can also be used to help students to recognize and discuss both types of conflict resolution.

Gandhi and King both have stories from their early life that can be used as examples for the students. Martin Luther King’s story about a childhood friendship would be especially powerful for young children, and likely, a story many of them could relate to in some way.

“From the age of three I had a white playmate who was about my age. We always felt free to play our childhood games together...at the age of six we both entered school-separate schools, of course. I remember how our friendship began to break as soon as we entered school; this was not my desire but his. The climax came when he told me one day that his father had demanded that he would play with me no more. I will never forget what a great shock this was
to me.” (Carson, p. 7)

Telling students stories like this and stories from your own life that they can relate to, will help them to think of their own story. As they begin to recognize the difference between violence and nonviolence they will develop a deeper understanding of the two. As they begin to think about and understand the difference between nonviolence and non-violence, they will begin to realize that nonviolence is a choice. Nonviolence will become something that they can practice in their lives when dealing with difficult situations.

Massachusetts State Content Standards:

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<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>K.L.3.1</td>
<td>By the end of grade 2, students will give oral presentations about personal experiences or interests, using clear enunciation and adequate volume.</td>
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<tr>
<td>K.L.6.1</td>
<td>By the end of grade 2, students will identify formal and informal language in stories, poems, and plays.</td>
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<tr>
<td>K.R.8.2</td>
<td>Students will retell a main event from a story heard or read.</td>
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Materials Needed:
- Paper
- Pencils
- crayons

Suggested Teaching Activities:
- Use this lesson after having finished a Writing Workshop unit on memoir and set up similar writing activities with this subject as the focus.
- Have the students draw pictures of things that have happened that are violent or not violent. In pairs have students simply tell their stories. Then, as a group, hear some of the stories and notice whether or not they are about violence or nonviolence, and if nonviolence, what type of nonviolence.

Bibliography:

The story of Harischandra online: [http://www.indiavilas.com/kidscorner/hari.asp](http://www.indiavilas.com/kidscorner/hari.asp)