Title: Transformative Clothing

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Grade Level/ Subject Areas: World History – 9th or 10th grade

Duration of Lesson: 1-2 class periods

Content Standards:
California Social Science Standards for World History:
10.4 Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.

4. Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson serves as an introduction to Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolence. Gandhi was a key figure in India’s independence struggle with Britain. He used ahimsa, nonviolence and civil disobedience as a way of defeating the British. Students will gain an understanding of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. By examining Gandhi’s clothing, students will then match events from Gandhi’s life and his evolving ideas connected to nonviolence. As clothing is a symbol of wealth, class, status and culture, students will also examine their own ideas regarding what it means to be civilized with Gandhi’s.

Guiding Questions:
In what ways does Gandhi’s changing of clothing styles reveal the evolution of his philosophy of nonviolence?

What are the basic components of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence?

What does it mean to be “civilized”?

Content Essay:

Transformative Clothing

Gandhi’s transformation toward embodying his philosophy of satyagraha, truth through nonviolence is evident through his changing of garments over the years. Gandhi’s change in garments reflected his movement from one level of humanity to the next. From the European style of machine made clothing to the donning of the simple hand-spun loin cloth, Gandhi consistently simplified his clothing. The further the human is away from the creation of the item, the further away one is from humanity. As Gandhi saw it, a civilization built upon the pursuit of individual manual labor would be the ideal form of civilization where each individual had the greatest capacity to reach truth. Through each shedding of the machine-made garments, Gandhi
shed modern civilization from his life and continued to move closer and closer to the truth that he saw in the philosophy of ahimsa, nonviolence. Thus, Gandhi provides a new idea of what it means to be civilized.

As a student in England, Gandhi wore European clothing, a symbol of his belief in the ways of modern civilization. “His fascination with England and the European way of life prompted him to become an English gentleman. He acquired a chimney-pot hat, had his clothes cut at the Army and Navy stores, and an evening suit made on Bond Street, which was a hub for the latest fashions. He also mastered the art of tying a tie” (Sethia, 21). Such clothing revealed Gandhi’s achievement of success and buy-in of western standards, thereby modern civilization. Over time, as Gandhi became less fascinated with western culture and modern civilization, he would “down grade” his lifestyle and shed European style for something more simple.

Gandhi continued to wear European dress as he worked as a barrister in South Africa, though it was here where his philosophy of nonviolence began to take form. It was in South Africa where Gandhi first learned of the brutality of British racial discrimination. After being thrown off of the train for sitting in the first class compartment, Gandhi resolved to “get to the bottom of color prejudice” and “it was on this night that he began to formulate his thoughts about rights and duties, about justice and courage, and about approaches to enduring transformation and change” (34).

Gandhi’s belief in duty is clear by the clothing choices made in South Africa. When the British were engaged in war with the Boers in 1899, Gandhi encouraged the Indian community to aid the British as “Indians had come to South Africa as British subjects and were also seeking rights there as British subjects … it was therefore imperative that Indians in South Africa assist the British in a difficult time” (48). He and many others would then wear the uniform of the British ambulance corps and assist those wounded in battle. In this case, the uniform represents his commitment and duty to the crown.

As Gandhi began to realize that the British were uninterested in relinquishing the power grip held over Indians in South Africa, his sense of duty shifted toward the needs of the Indian people. It was in response to the Black Ordinance in the Transvaal that Gandhi began to employ the term satyagraha, truth and nonviolence. “Satyagraha would rely on nonviolent methods such as open communication and dialogue, compromise, negotiations, noncooperation, and civil disobedience” (65). Members of the Indian community were trained in the ways of nonviolent resistance and embarked on a campaign to disobey the unjust laws of the Black Act. Many faced brute force and imprisonment as consequences to their defiance and ultimately Gandhi made a visit to the British Parliament in an effort to have the acts repealed. Though Gandhi didn’t get what he wanted, an end to racial discrimination and equal rights for all Indians, his trip to England served to further clarify his philosophy of nonviolence. On the train ride home, Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in which he articulated his ideas for Indian independence through the means of nonviolence.

*Hind Swaraj* made clear Gandhi’s vision of civilization. Modern civilization served the needs of the body, while sacrificing the welfare of the spirit. Modern machinery separates humans from their true nature and ability to achieve happiness. For Gandhi, true civilization 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, 84). *Hind Swaraj* also clearly articulated the four main concepts that encompass Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence: swaraj, satyagraha, sarvodaya, and swadeshi.

The word swaraj, which means self-rule, for Gandhi embodied the idea of individual self-rule and national self-rule. “For Gandhi, self-rule was the first step in a dispassionate and self-less engagement with the social and political reality” (90). Individual freedom had to be achieved before national freedom. Swaraj was to be achieved through ahimsa, or nonviolence. “In order to gain swaraj guided by the vision of a nonviolent state, Indians have the duty to adopt a fundamentally nonviolent and truth-based approach. For this, the Indians individually and collectively must rely on satyagraha, swadeshi, and sarvodaya” (93). Not only would Gandhi’s philosophy work to gain independence from the British, but it would also promote a new type of civilization, one based on love and service.

Satyagraha was the method of nonviolence first used in South Africa, a soul-force as opposed to body-force. Satyagraha, truth force, was the method by which swaraj would be achieved. By disobeying unjust laws in a nonviolent manner, the world would see the brutality of the British and support India’s demands for independence. In order for satyagraha to be effective and achieve swaraj, the adoption of swadeshi was necessary. For Gandhi, swadeshi came to mean reliance on one’s strength; in the context of empire, it meant India had to be self-sufficient. India could no longer rely on British industries, India had to focus inward and find ways to become self-sufficient. This would emerge in the boycotts of British cloth and salt, as well as spinning one’s own cloth and salt.

Lastly, Sarvodaya was the well-being of all. For Gandhi it was not enough to merely overthrow British rule in India, it also meant to create a new civilization built upon the principles of nonviolence. In this way, India would pursue constructive work that would ultimately serve the needs of everyone. Gandhi supported the creation of small communities that would work together to be self-reliant and serve the needs of every community member. He first constructed farms in South Africa and ashrams in India that served as models of how a new type of civilization could thrive.

Although Gandhi’s ideas were articulated in a very short period of time, it would take years before he truly embraced each of the ideals of ahimsa. His choice of clothing over the rest of his life will indicate the level of humanity and the level of nonviolence to which he had aspired. The first change will come after the Transvaal march in 1913. To mourn the deaths that occurred as a result of British violence toward the nonviolent march and strike, Gandhi wore a traditional Gujarati dhoti, a garment that covered him from his waist to his ankles. It was also at this time that his philosophy on nonviolence began to deepen further. He began to embody his love of nonviolence. This symbolic change of clothing reflects Gandhi’s deeper commitment to satyagraha, as he would take the lessons learned from the experiments with satyagraha in South Africa and use them in India.

Once in India, Gandhi began to work toward swaraj, or freedom/independence, from the British. In order to accomplish swaraj, one had to first begin the process of becoming nonviolent. As the modern industry of Britain began to supplant the traditional cotton textile industry in India, the British exploited Indians more and more. Gandhi undertook a seven month trip around India to
encourage Indians to boycott foreign clothes. As he saw the conditions of poverty in which Indians lived, he decided to change his own clothing one more time. “The root of India’s poverty, according to Gandhi, lay in the dependence on the colonial economy on foreign goods which had destroyed indigenous cottage industries in India and led to the unemployment of millions” (134). So, in 1921 Gandhi adopted the loin cloth and khaddar as his clothing. He felt he had no right to wear anything more than the ordinary people could wear. The adoption of such clothing modeled his commitment to the common people. Not only did this represent his connection to the people of India, it also reflected the deeper meaning of shedding modern civilization from his life and practice, allowing for a new definition of civilization to emerge.

Gandhi’s evolution toward nonviolence involved swadeshi, or self-sufficiency – which meant that Indians could not rely on the British textile industries that undermined, rather Indians should return to the traditional way of spinning cotton and making cloth. His seven month trip around India was the start of using swadeshi to support swaraj. Not only would Indians stop buying British cloth, they would spin their own cloth, support their own industry. The symbol of swaraj then became the charkha, the traditional spinning wheel. Gandhi dedicated several hours each day to spinning and encouraged Indians across the country to do so as well. By 1921, there were over 2 million charkhas operating in private homes (134). If each individual were to practice swadesi in a communal manner then sarvodaya could be achieved.

Individuals should be able to satisfy their basic needs by means of work or gainful employment. For Gandhi work was a vital human need. It was by means of work that they acquired self-discipline, self-restraint, capacity to plan their lives, ability to relate to others, a sense of self-respect and a measure of social recognition. Work was also a moral duty. Society was a system of cooperation, a collective yajna, to which each of its members had a ‘sacred’ duty to bring their distinct gifts and thereby contribute to the common good. Work was a form of participation in it, and to be denied it was to be denied an opportunity to do one’s duty. (Parekh, 2)

Though Gandhi’s ideas for swaraj and civilization had been articulated decades before his quest for national swaraj, his true fulfillment of the ideals about which he wrote evolved over time. As we look at the clothing that Gandhi wore, we see his full evolution from one level of commitment to his philosophy of nonviolence to the next. The decades following his switch to the loin cloth would be marked with increasing disruption to British goals and ultimately Indian independence.

Bibliography:


http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Gandhi
Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:
1. Warm-up: Show students two pictures of Gandhi. Ask them to write a response to the following questions: Which photograph reveals the more “civilized” Gandhi? What elements from the photos lead you to your conclusion? Students can do a think, pair, share – having a few students share their response with the class. Encourage students to think about their own concepts of what it means to be civilized. (See photos 1 and 2)
2. Give students the rest of the photographs of Gandhi and have them arrange the photos in order from youngest to oldest. Then give students events from Gandhi’s life and ideas on his philosophy that relate to each of the photos. Students should match the description with the appropriate photo. Follow this activity with a discussion on the basic components of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence and what students notice about his changing of clothing over time. (See photos below – choose as appropriate for lecture)
3. Provide students with a more concrete idea of the basic tenets of ahimsa and swaraj, based on the content essay above. This could be a powerpoint or any other activity that is the preference of the teacher. Emphasize the connections between the basic components of Gandhi’s philosophy from Hind Swaraj and India’s achieving independence from Britain.
4. Return to the idea of what it means to be civilized. How do we define civilization? How did the British define civilization? How did Gandhi define civilization? What signals do we observe in society that lead us to certain conclusions regarding “being civilized?”
5. Extension activity – challenge students to change their style for a day or to go without any brand name clothing for 1 day, week, etc. Have students share what they learn about themselves and others.

Photos:

Photo 1 In European clothing
Photo 2 Wearing loin cloth in England
Photo 3  As a child

Photo 4  In the ambulance corps in SA
Photo 5 Traditional Gujarati clothing

Photo 6 Spinning
Photo 7 In front of his law practice in SA
Photo 8

Photo 9 The Salt March
Photo 10 Gandhi meets a man with leprosy

Photo 11 Gandhi as a barrister in South Africa