### Title of Lesson: “Take a Walk in My Shoes”

**Lesson By:** Wing Man (Mandy) Kwan

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<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
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<td>K-3, Social Studies</td>
<td>20 to 25</td>
<td>2 to 3 days, each day’s session 45 minutes long</td>
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**Guiding Questions:**

- How did Gandhi and King demonstrate, embody, and exemplify compassion? (addressed in the content essay)
- How do we practice this principle in our daily lives? (addressed in the lesson activities)

**Lesson Abstract:**

In this lesson students will learn what compassion is, what a compassionate person does and/or says, and dramatize & role play situations on how to respond compassionately to others. Students will also learn about how Gandhi and King showed compassion.

**Lesson Content:**

There exists a delicate balance between each individual’s need for self-expression, as well as the desire to be part of a group, to partake in something greater than oneself. A sense of community and understanding between two people can be built in various ways. Compassion is one of the fundamental blocks to foster understanding, community, and togetherness.  

*Compassion*, as defined by the Princeton University’s *WordNet* and Webster’s Dictionary, is “a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering; the sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” It is a virtue that is urgently needed, since pain and suffering are pervasive around the world. There are many places in the world where conflict and war appear to be perpetual with no resolution in sight. Compassion is a way to counter and alleviate these situations around the world.

Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. both developed compassion in their life journeys. As they experienced and witnessed injustices around them, each underwent a process of reflection and paradigm shifts. As a result, their lives in words and deeds unified the notions of nonviolence, justice, and compassion. Both men of ordinary human passions and humble beginnings developed one of the highest virtues any human being can exhibit. They suffered along with other people’s pains. It seemed to be counter-intuitive to human nature for one to desire suffering, yet as this essay will examine, Gandhi and King cultivated this virtue through their experiences and interactions.

Compassion can be understood in a three-fold approach. First, a person has an awareness of suffering and injustice. Next, the person has sympathy for the person who is suffering. Finally, the person has an inner call or moral responsibility to action, an urgency to end another’s distress.
Over the course of his life, Gandhi went through a process of transformation and developed a compassionate heart for others’ suffering. Trained as a lawyer in London, but unsuccessful in finding a job in India, Gandhi sought for employment in South Africa. The seed of compassion was first planted when he rode a train to Martizburg for a court case. He was thrown off the first class compartment because of the color of his skin. This event stirred Gandhi’s heart. He realized that this particular incident was a symptom of a “deep disease of color prejudice” (Gandhi, 1940, p58). He reflected that “(he) should try, if possible, to root out the disease…” (Gandhi, 1940, p58)

Gandhi was sympathetic to the maltreatment of indentured servants in South Africa. Balasundaram, an Indian servant of a European master in Durban, was beaten and came to Gandhi trembling and weeping. So he sought the release of this victimized servant from his master. Gandhi’s sense of compassion and justice earned the other indentured laborers’ favor and trust. Gandhi realized that “service of the poor has been my heart’s desire, and it … enabled me to identify myself with them.” (Gandhi, 1940, p89). Gandhi was regarded as the servants’ friend and he “hailed this connection with delight…” because he can learn of their joys and sufferings.”

Gandhi’s identification with the lower class “further simplified (his) life (in) doing … concrete acts of service for (his) fellowmen” (Gandhi, 1940, p106). Thus he offered shelter and medical care for a leper that stumbled at his door. However, Gandhi realized that he could not take care of him forever. He “longed for …humanitarian work (of) a permanent nature” (Gandhi, P.105). Soon he served as a nurse at the St. Aidan’s Mission for a few hours daily. His desire to live among the poor was evident in the seemingly insignificant, yet highly symbolic decisions. On one occasion when he travelled from Calcutta to Rajkot, he deliberately rode on third class to have a first-hand experience of how the lower class travelled.

Gandhi was also practical and strategic in alleviating others’ suffering. When the unsanitary conditions in Johannesburg’s Indian ghettos came to Gandhi’s attention, he became their legal advisor to challenge the court. He used half of the fees he earned to build a hospital in these Indian towns. Meanwhile, the devastating black plague broke out in the slums. Gandhi and his friends began nursing and caring for the diseased, using their human touch to reach the hearts of the forgotten. In the villages of Champaran, Gandhi also built schools and found doctors to care for the needy. This was a typical pattern in Gandhi’s approach, in which he first addressed the suffering of the poor. Gandhi’s loyalty is not to “abstractions but to human beings in their day-to-day living” (Fischer, 1982, p59).

Gandhi gradually renounced the enjoyment of comforts and pleasures. “The change was internal than external,” he reflected. (Gandhi, 1940, p164). He became “less carnal (and) less self-centered.” (Fischer, 1982, p34) The weight of a materialistic life was removed, and the newfound energy was harnessed for the service of others—in lifting India to a consciousness of hind swaraj, or ‘self-governance’ or ‘home rule. Through noncooperation and nonviolent means, he strategically challenged the British rule and was always guided by truth. His political actions were never motivated by the media’s fanfare or attention. In protest of the heavy salt tax levied on the Indians, Gandhi led a spellbinding and successful salt march in 1930.
Gandhi’s compassion was extended to his enemies too. The South African whites disliked what he was stirring up, shaking the unequal system that has placed Indians in lower social ranks. Upon Gandhi’s second return from India, he was beaten by an angry and hostile crowd. He insisted on not pressing charges, for he recognized that their actions were conforming to unjust laws set by the government.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was also another renowned leader who demonstrated compassion toward those who were unjustly treated. King’s parents were important influences on him. The seeds of compassion were planted by a lineage of preachers in his family. When King was a student in Morehouse College, he felt an “inner urge calling (him) to serve humanity...a sense of responsibility which (he) could not escape.” (Carson, 1998, p16) He was deeply concerned about the “unemployment, slums, and economic insecurities” (Carson, 1998, p19) that the African Americans were experiencing. Though his initial career paths were in the medical or legal field, his continuing education at the Crozer Theological Seminary led to his determination to be a minister and a “profound advocate of the social gospel” (Carson, 1998, p19).

The notion of compassion and justice are closely related. According to Richard Reilly, who stated that “compassion is the basis of all moral value...of what it means to act justly or rightly”(Reilly, 2006, p13), he’s claiming that compassion and justice are fundamental to ethics. When one witnesses and identifies with the suffering of another person, the next logical and ethical step would be to rectify the injustice by changing the social, systemic, or personal causes.

King’s sense of compassion and justice was evident in his urgency to act in the face of inequalities that African-Americans faced. When segregation on buses was outlawed by the Supreme Court because of the year-long Montgomery bus boycott, many cities still did not uphold this ruling. King urged President Eisenhower to visit and speak at major cities in the South to ensure that desegregation is abided by all.

To personally understand the suffering of African-Americans, King also made sacrifices by uprooting his family to move to Atlanta so he could better coordinate the Southern Christian Leadership Conference campaigns. This brought King to the heart of the indignities that African-Americans have experienced. Not only did King involve himself on an administrative level in the strategic planning, he participated in the sit-ins also – not as a leader but as a follower. He “felt a moral obligation to be in it with them (the college students)” (Carson, 1998, p145).

King was well aware of the social injustices on different fronts. He acted compassionately toward those that were served unjustly. Besides desegregating buses and lunch counters, he also addressed segregation in federally assisted housing. He spoke to senator John F. Kennedy, who was then a presidential candidate, to issue an executive order to end it if he’s elected president. He also corresponded with President Eisenhower in addressing the disenfranchisement of African-Americans.
King’s compassion was also evident in his willingness to suffer along with the other freedom fighters, even to the extent of remaining in a jail cell. During the Albany Movement in Georgia in 1961. King was arrested along with 700 other protesters – but he insisted on remaining in jail because “(I) want to serve the time…(I) owe it to (myself) and the seven hundred and some odd people of this community who still have these cages hanging over them” (Carson, 1998, p159). Even when Lawrence Spivak of NBC’s Meet the Press begged him to leave the jail because of a scheduled interview. However, King still insisted on staying. King said that he wanted to “express a personal witness of a situation I felt was very important to me.” (Carson, 1998, p154 – 155)

King identified with the painful loss of a child on a personal level. In 1963, four innocent girls were killed in Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church as a result of a vicious bombing. Denise McNair was one of the girls killed. King wrote a letter to the family to sympathize with their pain: “I know there is nothing that can compensate for the vacant place in your family circle, but we … want to share a part of our sacrifice…with you.” (Carson, 1998, p234) King also refrained from celebrating the holiday’s festivities as a mourning and memorial to the losses.

King also connected on a personal level with the everyday struggles African-Americans faced. He listened and sympathized, availed himself to others when he went to farms and villages. In 1964 during the ‘Freedom Summer’ campaign in Mississippi, he “walked the streets, preached on front porches, at mass meetings, or in the pool halls…” (Carson, 1998, p250). King “…listened to their problems, learned of their fears, (and) felt the yearnings of their hope.” (Carson, 1998, p248) Racial tensions were also high in Los Angeles. Despite warnings of danger and remnants of violence from the riots in the Watts business district there, King “talked to people of all walks of life” (Carson, 1998, p291) because he was compelled to listen to the wounded and angry voices of African-Americans there.

King’s display of compassion rose to the next level when he chose to live among the poor. In 1966 he moved to Lawndale, a ghetto area in Chicago. He wanted to move the movement’s focus from the middle class to the grassroots level. He identified himself with the poor and youth there, to experience their dire living conditions and witness the violence there.

King was cognizant of the human rights struggle on a global level after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He realized that “poverty and hunger were not peculiar to Harlem and the Mississippi Delta. India, Mexico, the Congo…face essentially the same problems” (Carson, 1998, p258).

As evidenced in Gandhi and King’s development of compassion people treated unjustly, we too can learn to develop this virtue. It is a gradual process of witnessing and learning the sufferings of others, and cultivating the desire to ‘walk in another person’s shoes’, and take action to alleviate or rectify injustice or systematic maltreatment.

State Content Standards:
NYC Social Studies Scope & Sequence, K-5
Unit 1: Citizenship & Communities: being a citizen involves rights and responsibilities (5.3)

Unit 2: Civic Awareness: Considerate classmates are good citizens. (5.3b)

Students will help each other in many ways. (5.3c)

Materials Needed:
- The digital story “Compassion: take a walk in my shoes”
- chart paper / markers to write down students’ responses
- Photos of Gandhi and King
- Timeline of important events in Gandhi and King’s life, highlighting the times where both demonstrated compassion

Suggested Teaching Activities:

Lesson title: What is compassion and how can we be compassionate?
Learning goals: Students will be able to show understanding of compassion and learn the different ways to be compassionate

Sequence of the lesson:

Show section 1 of the digital story titled, “Everyone has feelings”. Discuss with students the different kinds of feelings we have. Example: happy, sad, surprised, frustrated, tired, upset. Write the responses on the chart & draw pictures to illustrate each feeling word.

Show section 3 of the digital story titled “Imagine how someone feels”. This section contains 4 scenes of tension (teasing, bullying, crying, and loneliness). After viewing, discuss the following questions:

- What is happening in each scene?
- Who is hurting in each scene?
- How can you help the person that is hurting?

Explain to students that when we help someone who is hurting, we are being compassionate. Write the word compassion and a short definition on the chart.

Discuss with the students what actions we can do to show compassion. Categorize their responses into two categories: actions and words. Examples: saying kind words, helping someone when they fall, listen to someone talk about their sad feelings, hug and give a pat on the shoulder, etc.

Show section 4 of the digital story “You can be compassionate too!” Students will view different scenes where people are being compassionate. After viewing add any applicable responses to the lists of compassionate words and actions and words.

Keep the charts available in the classroom as a continual reference for the students. This lesson can be revisited by finding different examples of conflicts in story books; students can also role play compassionate responses to the conflicts discussed.

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Lesson title: How did Gandhi and King show compassion?

Sequence of the Lesson:

1. Review with the students the meaning of compassion. Refer to the chart created in the previous activity.
2. Explain to the students that we’ll study two important historical people named Gandhi and King. Show photos of them.
3. Show students the timeline of Gandhi and King’s lives. Discuss the major events in each person’s life. Compare and contrast both men’s lives and significant events. Chart the responses of the class.
4. Choose 3 significant events from Gandhi and King’s lives. Preferably one from their early years, later years, and near the end of their lives. Discuss the “who, what, when, where, and why” of each event. Chart these events on a two-columned paper for comparisons.
5. Explain to the students that both Gandhi and King developed compassion in a gradual process, practiced and nurtured over time.
6. Discuss with students how each person can practice compassion in our everyday lives. Explain that one does not need to be an extraordinary person to be compassionate. Re-teach the previous lesson as needed to elaborate on different ways of demonstrating compassion.

Bibliography:


