Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson: Satyagraha in Daily Life
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 8th grade social studies
Class Size: 20 - 30
Time/ Duration of Lesson: 50 minute periods / 2 - 3 days

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
Goal: To understand the notion and application of satyagraha.
Objective: Students will be able to discuss the concept of satyagraha with at least an 80% on the discussion assessment form.

Lesson Abstract:
Students will review some of the basic concepts of Gandhi, including ahimsa, truth, and satyagraha. They will view a light-hearted view of Gandhi’s methods and discuss the practical application of Gandhi’s methods in today’s world.

Students will read a short story entitled “Satyagraha”, a story that takes place in a high school. One of the main characters uses satyagraha to deal with a bullying situation at school.

Lastly, students will brainstorm and discuss situations in everyday life where Gandhi’s methods could be used. They will be presented with a ten-step process for resolving conflicts.

Lesson Content:
Truth, for Gandhi, is akin to a religion. Each of us must seek out our own truth. “The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat, which means ‘being’. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth.”

Ahimsa is the principle of non-violence. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ahimsa is the “doctrine of refraining from harming any living being.” Joan Bondurant, quoting Louis Renou, refers to ahimsa as “action based on the refusal to do harm.

Gandhi recognized its importance and stated “ahimsa is the basis for the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is vain unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis.”

In combining truth and ahimsa, Gandhi looked for a word to describe the concept. He solicited ideas and arrived at the word “Satyagraha.” According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, Satyagraha is “ pressure for social and political reform through friendly passive resistance practiced by M. K. Gandhi and his followers in India.” Gandhi would not have been happy with that definition as it refers to it as passive-resistance. “Satyagraha differs from Passive Resistance as the North Pole from the South. The latter has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one’s end, whereas the former has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest and excludes the use of violence in any shape of form.”

According to Gandhi, Satyagraha was much more than passive resistance. He said it is “ a movement intended to replace methods of violence and a movement based entirely upon truth.”

Many have described Satyagraha as truth force. There is good reason for that. “Satyagraha was the Sanskrit combination Gandhi later chose as a name for his way of life and of action –
“Truth” and “Force” in literal translation.”

"With satya combined with ahimsa," Gandhi writes, "you can bring the world to your feet"

“For truth and non-violence are, for me, two faces of the same coin.”

Satyagraha involved self-sacrifice. Those who practiced it often were in harms way and did not resort to violence to bring about a resolution to the conflict. “For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.”

By combining both truth and ahimsa, Gandhi realized the power involved. “Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; truth is the end.”

(Jean Bondurant, in her book, Conquest of Violence, reviews five satyagraha campaigns of Gandhi. Those insights will provide the reader with more specific details of Satyagraha in action.)

Satyagraha, as practiced by Gandhi, was much more than conflict resolution. Satyagraha involves an unrelenting quest for the truth in a non-violent fashion. However, A modern day application of his methods in everyday life is the resolving of conflicts. One of the things that sets a Gandhian approach apart from others is that at any step of the way there is the opportunity to negotiate a compromise. According to Mark Jurgensmeyer, the following basic rules apply to conflict resolution:

1) Do not avoid confrontation
2) Stay open to communication and self-criticism.
3) Find a resolution and hold fast to it.
4) Regard your opponent as a potential ally.
5) Make your tactics consistent with the goal.
6) Be flexible – be willing to change tactics.
7) Be temperate – escalate your actions by degrees
8) Be proportionate – determine which issues deserve your time and energy
9) Be disciplined – consistency is one of your strengths.
10) Know when to quit

The story “Satyagraha” is a well-written short story that parallels Gandhi’s life to a certain degree. The author has a couple parallels of Gandhi’s life that are apparent to those familiar with the details of Gandhi’s life. For instance, the Indian boy in the story is named Ramdas, the name of one of Gandhi’s sons. Ramdas works as a medic for the high school football team. This parallels Gandhi’s roll as ambulance corps member at several times in his career.

An excerpt of the story is provided here. This should be sufficient to get a flavor for the story. The actual story is about 13 pages long. If possible it is suggested to locate the story and read it in its entirety. There is good character development and, of course, the resolution to the story – whether or not the technique is effective as it is applied in the story. The bibliography section includes information about the book, including the ISBN number. (Used copies of the books can usually be purchased from Amazon or other places quite cheaply.)
1. Gandhi, M.K. *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 38
6. Gandhi, M.K. *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 6
7. ibid., p. 19
11. ibid., p. 17
12. ibid., p. 11

### Wisconsin State Content Standards:

Social Studies B.8.10 Analyze examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, or nations

Social Studies E.8.12 Describe conflict resolution and peer mediation strategies used in resolving differences and disputes

Social Studies E.8.14 Describe cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups, and nations, such as helping others in times of crisis

### Guiding Questions:

- What was the essence of satyagraha?
- What were some techniques of conflict resolution used by the characters in the story?
- What are some current conflicts in the world today?
- Would Gandhi’s methods work in today’s world?

### Materials Needed:

- LCD projector
- Chalkboard, white board, overhead or white paper
- Classroom arrangement that allows for discussion

### Lesson Context:

This lesson will be a review of some of the basic term such as ahimsa, truth and satyagraha. The goal is to make certain the students understand the basic concepts so that they may apply them to everyday situations.

This lesson would come near the end of a unit on Gandhi.

### Teaching Activities:

1. Begin with a review of the terms ahimsa, truth, and satyagraha. (Depending on the depth of coverage of your unit on Gandhi, you may want to add additional terms or concepts.) This review can be informally or you may want to design a more involved or fun way to make certain students know the basic concepts.
2) Before the students watch the video, instruct them to look for evidence of Gandhi’s message. Watch the short video on Gandhi. The movie is a light-hearted view of some of Gandhi’s thoughts using lyrics from popular songs.

3) Ask the question on whether or not Gandhi’s methods or way of life would fit in today’s world. Discuss.

4) After the discussion has wound down, read the short story entitled “Satyagraha.” The story takes place in a high school setting. A young man who assists with injured players is getting picked on by one of the football players. He uses Gandhi’s methods in dealing with the problem. One of his friends sees his approach and initially accuses him of doing nothing. However, as the story progresses, he comes to understand what Satyagraha is and how it can be effective.

5) You may want to do the story as a read aloud and take time to discuss it along the way. Perhaps have the students predict what will happen. Or, you may want to withhold the ending pages to have the students suggest possible endings. The story itself should provide for a good discussion. Students can discuss the story and its relevance to today. Is the story realistic? What elements of satyagraha come out in the story?

6) When the discussion of the story has ended, have the students brainstorm a list of current situations of conflict. These can be at school, at home, in the community or the world. You may want to have the students do a think, pair, share. Or perhaps small groups / large groups. Use whatever ways with which you have met with success for your class.

7) The importance of the lesson is making the connection to other situations that are relevant to the students in everyday life. Depending upon the group there may be a wide variety of suggestions and situations. Obviously you will need to use your discretion and expertise to steer the discussion in an appropriate manner. As students are sharing their ideas, you may want to pick a situation to showcase. Go through the steps to resolving the conflict in a Gandhian fashion.

8) As a large group, discuss the situations. What are some current ways of discussing the problems? What would be a Gandhian approach?

9) You may want to have the students make an action plan. What are they going to do? Or, have the students keep a journal for the next week. What are some situations that they see where conflict arises? Were there times when they had an opportunity to use a non-violent approach to solve conflict?

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
The students will be assessed through the use of the Discussion Assessment (Appendix)

It is important to discuss the discussion from ahead of time so the students are aware of what the expectations are.

**Bibliography:**


**Merriam-Webster Dictionary.** [http://www.m-w.com/dictionary](http://www.m-w.com/dictionary)


**Truth Force.** [http://habitat.igc.org/gksnv/20030206.htm](http://habitat.igc.org/gksnv/20030206.htm)
Appendix


I shook my head. “Well, maybe you could at least stop being so passive about everything.”

He laughed. “You would have me fight William Patchett?”

“Well, not exactly, but –“

“Because I will not fight. It goes against everything I believe.”
“I don’t expect you to fight him, but you can stand up to him in other ways.”

“But I am.”
“How’s that?”
“By not reacting with force. Force is never justified.”
“Well maybe not in this case. But—“
“No, Kenneth, in all cases. Never, no matter how good the cause.”
“Oh, come on. How else are supposed to keep other people or other countries from taking what’s ours?
“Sometime you’ve got to use force.”

He sighed. “I guess that is what a lot of you Americans believe. But I believe that you can resist in another way. Mahatma Gandhi called it satyagraha, to stand firmly for truth and love without ever resorting to force.”

I stared at him in disbelief. I mean, Bill was about to turn him into a smear of jelly and Ramdas was talking about some dead holy man!

“Well, that may be very cool, Ram, but –“

“You have heard of Gandhi, have you not?”
“Sure. I mean, the name, anyway. And I’d love to hear more. But right now I think you’d better tell me what you’re planning to do about Bill Patchett.”
“I am telling you. The Mahatma used satyagraha to fee all of India from the British. I think I can use it to control Mr. William Patchett.”
“Oh, sure. But I bet Gandhi never had to face down six foot four, 249 pounds of crazed defensive end. “Ram, listen –“

He interrupted gently. “Let me tell you a story. Under British rule it was illegal for Indians to make their own salt. Everyone had to buy expensive government salt, and that was very hard on the poor. Three thousand of the Mahatma’s followers went to protest the law at a place called the Dharasana Salt Works. They stepped four at a time up to a line of soldiers, never lifting a hand to defend themselves, and let the soldiers beat them down with bamboo clubs. Those who could got up and went to the back of the line. All day they marched up to the soldiers until the soldiers were so tired they could not lift their arms.”
“What did that prove?”
“It proved that the Mahatma’s follower were willing to suffer for what they believed without doing hurt to others. Their example brought hundreds of thousands of new recruits to the struggle for independence. Eventually, the jails were full and the country did not work anymore and the British had to leave.”

It was my turn to sigh, because this had gotten a long way from football or figuring out a way to keep Bill from turning Ramdas into an ooze of pink on a locker door.
“Look, Ramdas, that might have worked in India, but in this country –“
“Your Martin Luther King made it work in this country.”

“Okay, point taken, but what are you going to do about Bill?”
“Just what I am doing? I am going to answer his violence with satyagraha. Someday, his arms will get tired.”
“If he doesn’t kill you first.”
Ramdas smiled faintly. “There is always a risk.”

Ramdas didn’t get it. Ok, he was Indian, had moved here with his family only a couple of years ago. But somehow he must have gotten this satyagraha thing wrong. No way could it work. During study hall I went to the library, figuring I could find something that would prove it to him. All the Internet computers were busy, so I went to the shelves. I found a thick book with a lot of photographs of Gandhi and sat down to page through it. And…it…blew…me…away. Here was this skinny little guy with thick glasses and big ears wandering around in sandals and a loincloth, and he’d won! And I mean big time: freed his country without even lifting his hand against anybody. Incredible.
Now, I’m not the kind who tosses and turns half the night worrying about things. I am a jock. I need my sleep. When I hit the pillow, bam, I’m gone. But that night I lay thinking until well past midnight. Hadn’t Jesus said to turn the other cheek? Ramdas was living that, and he was Hindu or something, while most of the guys I saw in church on Sunday would prefer to beat the other guy to a pulp. Man, oh, man, I didn’t need this. Let Sarah and Ramdas talk philosophy; I was just a jock. But like it or not, I was going to have to do something or feel like a hypocrite forever.
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Discussion Levels:
5 = participating, making connections, asking questions ("I agree with…", "Why do…?", etc.)
4 = participating and engaged but stating not connecting
3 = makes only one comment
2 = appears to be listening but does not speak
1 = inattentive, not involved

A loss of points will result in blurtling out or making inappropriate comments

Discussion shorthand
• = hand raised waiting to speak
IAW = I agree with…
H = Higher order
X = spoke
IDW = I disagree with…
T = Thick stmt
LWS = "Like what ____ was saying"
BTW = Back to what …
IU = I understand …
"- = inappropriate remark or behavior"
OT = Off topic
ABS = Absent
Rules for Discussion
1) You have permission to be uncomfortable
2) Please leave all putdowns outside the door
3) If you’re not confused, you’re not trying hard enough.
4) Everyone, without exception, has something valuable to contribute, including genuine questions and half-baked thoughts.
5) Please expect to share your contributions, and, if needed, to be called upon to do so.
6) As a general rule, new participants to the discussion have priority over previous contributors.
7) Look for the good and the reasonable in others’ comments
8) Seek to understand before you critique.
9) It is okay, and expected, that you will disagree at times. It is NOT okay to attack or blame.
10) Try to be specific rather than global about agreements and disagreements. Specificity sustains engagement.
11) Each person is responsible for her/his own learning, although every other person can contribute to it.
12) Learning and discussions are processes. Be open to each.

Sample feedback given day 2

Thoughts from Day #1
- Speak so you can be heard
- Asking questions is not only okay, but encouraged
- Involve everyone, look for new comers to the discussion

Things to try
- Try saying other people’s names. “I agree with what _____ was saying”. Or “getting back to what _____ said.”

Discussion reflection (Use the back if necessary) Name ____________________________

1) What did you contribute to the discussion today? If you did not speak, please explain why?

2) What have you learned from the discussion? Do you have any new insights?

3) How are you connected to the topic? (How does it affect you?)

4) What questions do you have about the topic or about something that was raised during the discussion?

5) What suggestions do you have to improve the discussion?