Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title:
Creating Peace Through Truth

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
7th-8th Grade Literacy

Duration of Lesson:
2-3 weeks

Common Core Content Standards:
RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).
W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Lesson Abstract:
By comparing and contrasting several written works with the overarching theme of Truth, students will discover how speaking Truth creates peace within themselves and extends out through the school and into the community.

Guiding Questions:
What is the difference between truth and Truth?
What is truth according to Gandhi?
What are those levels in the Buddha and the Terrorist?
How and why is Truth a major pillar in ahimsa?

Content Essay:
We all have a strong inner truth in ourselves that when expressed becomes a force for positive change. This truth is called satya. When used in conjunction with nonviolence to create a positive change, it becomes satyagraha or “truth-force.” Expressing satyagraha leads to self-rule (swaraj), thereby leading to peace. Gandhi recognized Truth (satyagraha) as a major pillar of ahimsa (nonviolence). By using “truth-force” (a combination of truth and nonviolence), one can create positive change in the community. The Buddha and the Terrorist demonstrates the value of Truth.
At first, *The Buddha and the Terrorist* sounds like a tale of redemption and forgiveness. But below the surface emerges a lesson on the importance of telling the Truth and how that Truth can lead to a peaceful mind and even a peaceful community. Often people hide from the Truth as a way to avoid conflict. However, Gandhi has taught that conflict can be resolved through Truth. In fact, Truth is on the path to peace. According to *Gandhi Pioneer of Nonviolent Social Change*, Gandhi defined Truth as the force of the inner spirit and that “Truth for Gandhi was the soul” (Sethia, 47). Gandhi used this “truth-force” or “soul-force” to lead India to independence. If Gandhi can lead a country through a nonviolent revolution using Truth, then certainly I can lead my students to ahimsa or peace through Truth. *The Buddha and the Terrorist* models this path to peace through Truth.

In the beginning, The Buddha arrives to the town Savatthi whereupon he sees it is deserted. Lady Nandini explains to him that the streets are empty because Angulimala is terrorizing the town by relentlessly killing people for their fingers. He wears this finger collection on a necklace. Nandini warns the Buddha not to go into the forest where Angulimala is living. Now, you may be thinking “Nandini just told Buddha the truth about Angulimala in order to protect him.” But this is the kind of truth based solely in facts and data. This truth is does not emanate from the soul. Nandini is using this fact-based truth to create fear in the Buddha thus hiding the Truth and inhibiting positive change or ahimsa. The Buddha knows that Satyagraha (truth-force) means having “the courage of voluntarily embracing suffering and even death for a just cause” so, he chooses to travel through Angulimala’s forest.

When the Buddha encounters Angulimala, he greets him with a smile and keeps on walking. Then the Buddha proceeds to call for Angulimala and ignores the fact-based truth that Angulimala’s “bloodstained clothes and sweating body gave off a disturbing smell. Aggression emanated from his heavy black mustache and beard and his long matted hair” (Kumar, 14) in favor of Truth or soul-force. The Buddha sees beyond Angulimala’s outward appearance, or truth, and reveals Angulimala’s Truth by asking profound questions as to why he is terrorizing the village.

Once Angulimala tells the Buddha the Truth about why he is terrorizing the village, the door to ahimsa is opened in his soul. Angulimala is then renamed Ahimsaka. Ahimsaka knows that he must tell his Truth to the King and the village. He says, “I must confront my past, and face the future” (Kumar, 45). Ahimsaka returns to the village and the people beat him (pages 55-56). This scene represents Truth and truth. Ahimsaka reveals his Truth to the village telling them why he killed and how he changed. The people are so blinded by the factual truth of who he killed that they nearly kill him.

Nandini stops the crowd from beating Ahimsaka and rushes him back to the Buddha. While Ahimsaka is recovering, Nandini remarks to the Buddha, “It is essential to find truth and establish facts” (Kumar, 67). The Buddha replies, “Truth has to sit within the family of virtues. Seeking truth is not enough—especially not at the expense of addressing the pain of the present moment” (Kumar, 67). Here, the Buddha explains that truth based only in facts is not productive, but harmful.

Ahimsaka is then put on trial in the village. The villagers tell the truth about their pain to Ahimsaka. He admits his guilt and then tells his story (Truth) to the villagers. They do not accept this and wish to put his to death for his crimes. It is not until Sujata speaks the Truth that the mood changes. She says, “…Angulimala’s death will not bring my husband back to life…to ask for his death in this situation would merely be an act of revenge…Angulimala’s example
shows us that no one is beyond redemption” (Kumar 101-102). The villagers realize through Sujata’s Truth that they, too, can find a way to forgive.

Once Angulimala told himself the Truth of his pain, he became peaceful. He then told the King and the villagers the Truth about his crimes and his transformation. The villagers told the Truth of their pain and they were able to forgive and be at peace. All the while the Buddha told everyone the Truth and he was always at peace. This powerful parable teaches that Truth creates peace and leads to ahimsa in society.

This pathway to peace is reflected in the documentary *Long Night’s Journey Into Day: South Africa’s Search for Truth & Reconciliation*. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up a trial similar to the trial of Angulimala. Families of those murdered were able to hear the Truth of the crimes committed enabling South Africa to heal and move forward.

In another scenario, a woman enters a hospital and shoots a nurse she believes is having an affair with her husband. Another nurse on duty, Nurse Black, stops the shooter by putting her arm around her and stating the woman’s Truth, “You’re in pain. I’m sorry, but everybody has pain in their life….I understand and we can work it out.” Nurse Black saved the woman from killing herself and from killing the other nurse (Nagler, 39). Speaking Truth created peace.

All of these stories tie directly back to Gandhi’s letter:

183. A Letter  
*July 24, 1947*

Realizing Truth means realizing that all human beings are one, that all religions are one, just as our limbs are members of the same body.

Once Truth is realized and spoken, people are able to see into each other’s souls and recognize each other’s humanity. This Truth connects us all and makes it impossible to be anything but peaceful.

By reading these stories or stories with similar themes, students can realize the power of Truth. Students can then tell Truth in their own lives helping create more honest and peaceful communities.

**Bibliography:**


Teaching Activities
   - Depict the meaning through a drawing/design/sculpture/essay
2. Read *The Recess Queen*
   - Students will analyze the story
   - Students will list character traits of Mean Jean and Katie Sue and determine who is dynamic and who is static
   - Students will explain what happened when Katie Sue told the truth to Mean Jean (why Mean Jean is dynamic)
   - Students will explain why the other kids didn’t tell the truth to Mean Jean and why they were silent when Katie Sue spoke up
   - Students will explain the resolution and determine how telling Truth created a peaceful playground
   - Students will make connections between Gandhi’s letter and *The Recess Queen*
   - Students will recall and write about a childhood moment similar to that of Mean Jean in *The Recess Queen*
3. Read *The Buddha and the Terrorist* each day for about 2 weeks depending on time allotted.
   - Students will list character traits of the Buddha and Angulimala and determine who is dynamic and who is static
   - Students will identify and take notes on when Truth is told
   - Students will use these notes and analyze how telling Truth created peace in the community. What happened when the Buddha told Angulimala Truth? What happened when Angulimala told himself Truth? What happened when the community told Angulimala Truth? What happened when Angulimala told Truth to the community?
   - Students will make connections between Gandhi’s letter and *The Buddha and the Terrorist*
   - Students will compare and contrast *The Recess Queen* with *The Buddha and the Terrorist*
   - Students will list character traits of the distraught woman and Nurse Black
   - Students will explain the resolution and the role that Truth played
   - Students will make connections between Gandhi’s letter and the excerpt
   - Students will recall and write about a time similar to that of Nurse Black
5. Students will reflect on the readings and their notes and write an essay answering the essential questions of:
   1. How does Truth create peace in yourself, in your home, in your classroom, in your school, and in your community?
   2. How does this relate to Gandhi’s letter?
   3. What action can you take?
6. Read “Simple Truth” by Brian Andreas
   - Students will analyze the poem
   - Students will write a poem with the theme of Truth creating peace
   or
   - Students will create a depiction of Truth creating peace
Realizing Truth means realizing that all human beings are one, that all religions are one, just as our limbs are members of the same body. 

2. The Recess Queen by Alexis O’Neill

3. The Buddha and the Terrorist by Satish Kumar

4. The power of the medical window became very real one summer day in 1993 in the emergency room of a Los Angeles hospital. A distraught woman entered the hospital intending to gun down a nurse she believed was having an affair with her estranged husband. She found the woman she was looking for and shot but did not kill her. The wounded nurse lurched down to the emergency room with her assailant in pursuit. ER nurse Joan Black was on duty. She had heard the code signal that a person with a gun was loose in the hospital moments before her wounded fellow nurse and then the woman, .38 in hand, burst through the door. Black, sixty-two, reacted with the instincts of an experienced medical person: “I put my arm around her and started talking to her. She kept saying that she didn’t have anything to live for, that this woman had stolen her family. I kept saying, ‘You’re in pain. I’m sorry, but everybody has pain in their life….I understand and we can work it out.’” (The story about the shooting was front-page news: Nurse Black’s heroic saving of the situation appeared only in a later section. What can you do?) Talking steadily like this, and in the meantime pushing down the gun every time the woman tried to kill herself with it, Black finally calmed her down.


“Simple Truth” by Brian Andreas
   Her whole life shifted the day she started to tell the truth about what made her happy
   I never knew it could be that simple, she said