Title of Lesson: How speaking the truth (satya) transforms both the individual and the community. Examples of satyagraha in contemporary culture.

*Spitting the Truth and Living It.*

Lesson by: Sarabeth Leitch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS. English and Journalism</td>
<td>25-40</td>
<td>2 week unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 days (83 min/day)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guiding Questions:
- Why is speaking the truth essential?
- How does courage and confidence come from speaking one’s mind?
- How does an individual spur social change through being a spokesperson?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson is designed to help youth start examining how honest reflection and dialogue are the foundation of self-expression and social change. In students’ work regarding this topic, they will analyze text (in non-fiction, literature and lyrics) in order to synthesize how historically words are used as a tool of development. The end goal would be for them to then use their own ideas and voice for the greater good: both personally and socially.

Lesson Content:

*The Path to Satyagrahi (one who adheres to the truth/nonviolent resistance).*

To be an honest person is one of the utmost goals of all human beings, according to the anecdotal surveys of Dr. Bernard LaFayette. (LaFayette, Lecture, July 20, 2009, Ahimsa Institute) Whether you are a school teacher, a postal carrier, a budding NBA player, a prison inmate or a park ranger, chances are you would place being honest as a number one priority. LaFayette’s research shows this, and he has spoken with a variety of individuals, as an instructor in the methods of nonviolence. He lets this fact guide his work because it is the key to acceptance, healing and awakening.

Honesty seems like just a noble character trait; however, it is this trait that can propel wonderful acts, specifically the development of a community bent towards social justice. Gandhi pioneered—or refined, depending on whom you talk to—this approach to social
reform.

It started with satya, which means “the truth”. It must be noted that Gandhi did not mean this purely in terms of seeking out the meaning of life but rather making concrete observations about the world in a non-static way. Viewing the truth then is like when you are in a boat trying to reach the shore. You may never see it or know exactly where it is, but you continue to take one step towards it in order to reach it. (Parel, Lecture, July 15, 2009, Ahmisa Institute).

Gandhi applied this personal pursuit of truth to the next step of human development: global transcendence, which he referred to as satyagraha or soul force. “Gandhi’s strategy was ‘war’ armed with a moral force. He called the force ‘satyagraha’—an active pursuit of truth through love and nonviolence.” (Sethia, 2005, p.1373) Satyagraha then is the fundamental principle for teaching nonviolence.

While Gandhi believed that most humans are good by basic nature, he acknowledged that practicing satya requires both effort and focus. That being said, many are still unwilling to practice satyagraha because they consider it too hard or do not see an instant effect. One way to overcome this is to study the lives of accomplished leaders that model dedication in order to be inspired. Achieving this path of virtue through truth in one’s actions and words allows one to gather not only inner strength but also outer confidence. This ends up transforming not only the individual but also vicariously the world around them. Students must acknowledge that it takes time, patience and dedication, but by dissecting the words and works of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.—and even the likes of today’s hip hop artists—folks can witness the building of a spokesperson and the budding of a revolution.

When a classroom begins to study these role models, they must understand that becoming a spokesperson is by no means easy—not even to those that we often put on a pedestal. The following examples prove this to be true. That is why we must demystify the effort that goes into truthful living and break it down in parts, steps and focuses. That way everyone can identify with this goal, not just those deemed “holy” or above the law of humans.

**The anecdotes that lead the path to truth**

_GANDHI_

Being that Gandhi initially came from a more privileged background, he started as simply a thoughtful, risk taker. It was not until he lost his sense of safety, pride and justice that truth sort of snuck its way into his life and forced him to recognize it. There were a few moments leading up to this.

First, the typical childhood stories of lying to the parents. Most can relate to this testing of one’s own morals. He also has unique ways of connecting to what he finds as the truth. He reads and then sees a play, _Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka_, as a child and images from it resonate with him and push him to began exploring truth (Gandhi, 1983, p.5). He even has
interesting tales of how his body feels when he feels like he is being dishonest or going against what is right. One story in particular is about when he secretly eats meat after being coerced by a Muslim friend to eat meat because of all its great benefits (both realistic and based in lore). He ends up sneaking off to eat goat only to become instantly sick. He even dreams of the animal bleating in his stomach. (Fischer, 1954, p.12) As a young man, he begins to have emotional and physical responses to what feels “right”.

To illustrate that Gandhi’s pursuit of truth in his own life was a slow, meditative process both Dr. Tara Sethia and historian Louis Fischer focus on the journey that lead to Gandhi’s legacy. Fischer points out that the “real Gandhi”, the one we see as an activist, did not come into existence until after college. “For Gandhi was not the student type. He was a doer, and he gained knowledge, confidence, and stature through action.” (Fischer, 1954, p.19) He talks about the nineteen-year-old as “green” and that it was not until his public service in his young adulthood that his true self came to the surface. “The Mahatma of the twentieth century who led millions is so great as to suggest that until public service tapped his enormous reserves of will power, intuition, energy, self-confidence and devotion to a cause his true personality.” (Fischer, 1954, p.20) This seems to be quite accurate as all of these stories form Gandhi’s childhood led up to him practicing satyagraha.

For Gandhi, all of his inner frustrations built up to two transformative moments regarding truth (Fischer, 1954, p.20-21). Firstly, he witnesses what seemed to be the true character of people at the time. When he was a lawyer, he pleaded with two brothers to speak the truth about an altercation in order to solve the problem reasonably. He was promptly and roughly thrown out. This showed him that others were not willing to do what it took to be just. Unfortunately though, in this first example, he turns to escapism rather than confrontation of values by leaving India for South Africa.

The second moment is what many outside observers would note as the turning point in what would be a long path of passive resistance. He had been asked to move cars on a train because of his skin color, regardless of the fact that he had a first-class ticket. The constable still asked him to move and he simply replied that he was not going to move voluntarily. This is when he was once again thrown out. He chose to sit there all night, in front of everyone refusing to move from the platform and thinking of his own duty. He thought, “Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing my case?” (Gandhi, 1984, p.97) Thankfully, for all humankind he chose to let this genuine observation of injustice become a call to action in his own life. “Whenever Gandhi felt distressed or disturbed he wanted to do something about it. In the presence of evil he had to act. Mere headshaking and hand-wringing never satisfied him.” (Fischer, 1954, p.22)

_MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR._

Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of many childhood moments that pushed him quickly from childlike innocence into a true understanding of the segregated world that was home: he lost a childhood friend because of the difference in skin color; he was slapped in a department store; and he spent many a day feeling the direct emotional impact of
segregation out in the community. He even has an internal monologue that depicts this, specifically when riding the buses, “One of these days, I’m going to put my body up there where my mind is.” (Carson, 1998, p.9)

He credits his upbringing in a family of love and respect as what taught him to have the basic trust of the good in people (Carson, 1998, p.2-3). He witnesses his father and mother use the truth as a tool to heal and rise up, and he wants to model it. He notes this in several stories he tells about his father interacting with police or community members. Martin Luther King, Sr. never raises his hand to another man; he simply uses truthful words to correct a situation. “‘Let me make it clear to you that you aren’t talking to a boy. If you persist in referring to me as a boy, I will be forced to act as if I don’t hear a word you are saying.’” (Carson, 1998, p.8) MLK, Jr. witnessing these moments allows him to grasp that having a truthful mind and spirit is foundational for humanity. This juxtaposition of internal and external conflict then acted as a propelling force for MLK, Jr. to be proactive and begin developing passive resistance much like his father role-modeled.

**How truth transforms**

When people are able to practice their principles in their communities, we as an audience get the pleasure of witnessing both the individual and society transform together. As we have seen in both the lives of Gandhi and MLK Jr., they started by simply leading their lives in a way that was fit for their own state of mind. At some point in time they were called to put those values into practice, which reaffirmed their beliefs. These were not mere hunches. They began focusing their life in a way that allowed both the people around them and themselves to evolve.

*Individual Transformation*

Both men had practice opening up about their feelings and letting intuition guide their lives. Even the Dalai Lama cites this as essential, “The Dalai Lama, like Gandhi, believes that the cultivation of inner peace and integrity is the ultimate weapon for world peace because happiness lies within oneself.” (Sethia, 2005, p.1374)

MLK Jr. found a way to move from what seemed as a natural inclination into something that was an analytical approach to life: from fundamentalism to idealism to truth. “[I came] to recognize the complexity of man’s social involvement and the glaring reality of collective evil.” (Carson, 1998, p.27) With the guidance of friends, teachers, spiritual convictions, politics and observations, these men felt comfortable speaking with their friends, family, congregations and community groups about what was going on inside of their heads.

*Society Transforms*

Once one understands satya, then they can use it as a force. This is where the world starts bending towards peace and justice. By enacting satyagraha, the world witnesses—from both the small and large scale—how an individual choosing to become a satyagrahi profoundly impacts their community. Black university students decided one day that it was only fair for them to be able to sit at the same counter as everyone else, so they sat down. Gandhi
wanted Indians in South Africa to be able to vote, so he fasted. MLK Jr. spoke the truth of individuals loud so everyone could hear, and people responded. One person’s truth can connect to what others have in their heart. This is turn creates mass movements of satyagraha.

**Constant Practice**
The more one becomes comfortable in their own skin practicing being truthful, the more it becomes its own mediation.

Gandhi even states this directly as his cause to write the Hind Swaraj (self-rule) many years later. “I have written because I could not restrain myself.” (Parel, 1997, p.9) He writes about this compulsion in his letters to others, and he shows his interest in the amount of texts that he devours. He also demonstrates this by writing the *Hind Swaraj* in a dialogue. It shows that Gandhi is not opposed to questions or critiques of his ideals rather it builds the process. He knows that dialogue and being open are fundamental to the movement and to satyagraha.

Both of these men do not just make claims about the truth. The study it, the read about it, the ask questions about it. Between these elements of their academia and their own life experiences, they are able to piece together that honest words get a desired response. Violent actions and hateful words only perpetuated the problems that existed, where as the truth mended the heart, mind and soul.

They also both reiterate time and time again that satyagraha is a life routine, not a one-time event. MLK Jr. used many metaphors to hammer home this point. “Anyone who starts out with the conviction that the road to racial justice is only one lane wide will inevitably create a traffic jam and make the journey infinitely longer.” (Carson, 1998, p.49). One must instead be honest with oneself and have trust that taking the slow path will eventually lead to a more permanent change, being that it is solidified in the heart—not just the mind.

**The Benefit**
Now Gandhi was not the first person to perform the act of being truthful, some would reference Jesus, Buddha or other historical figures, who put these values as first and foremost in their life. Those that came before him inarguably shaped Gandhi’s life, and we even see how Gandhi’s honesty and commitment to truth in turn shaped MLK Jr.’s life. He speaks to it quite directly. “The whole concept of Satyagraha (Satya is truth which equals love, and agraha is force; Satyagraha therefore, means truth force or love force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform.” (Carson, 1998, p.23)

This being said there is the idealistic continued pattern of one voice learning from another. Each person can have their own revelation, but the concept becomes universal when we see the outcome of the truth in others’ lives—not just personal values, but a deliberate, well-studied, genuine truth of spirit. Dr. Anthony Parel highlights how essential the
foundation of truth is to proactive change, and he puts this into words well when he says, “In order to practice nonviolence, you must have an understanding or definition of the truth.” (Parel, Lecture, July 15, 2009, Ahmisa Institute)

People today continue to reflect and speak the truth about society, and one place that this is most evident is through hip hop music. If one can peel away the layers of mass marketing and hone in on the voice of the artist, we begin to find our contemporary spokespeople. They are attempting the same feats as our great leaders, if those are listening.

**The Connection to Now**

Both of these two leaders did not expect to utter the truth and have everyone just follow it. They recognized that one’s own satya would lead them through the same process if the individual remains open minded. This is not just a humble remark but also an essential one. For example, Gandhi asks to not be a saint, but rather a catalyst. “I ask nobody to follow me. Everyone should follow their own inner voice.” (Merton, 48)

In fact, not only did Gandhi lead the largest, non-violent movement in the history of the world, but historians credit his ideas of truth and justice to moral and political development in modern day demonstrations, revolutions and rallies. (Sethia, 2005, p.802). The hip-hop movement samples many of these philosophies and is one example of truth fighting for justice. Artists today will still give props to Gandhi and MLK Jr. as a way to show credit to those that laid the pathwork. In addition, hip-hop’s history and development will show sentiments that are reflective of both Gandhi and MLK Jr.’s work.

The music, the energy and the focus spawned from the crime-laden streets of the Bronx. Once a quiet neighborhood, one man’s dream of a super road gentrified an entire borough. Many people moved away from the demolished neighborhoods and landlords saw an opportunity for “get rich quick” plans. This left many people without a sense of community, and the younger generations quickly turned to gang violence.

Though this tragic scene even drew the attention of the likes of Jimmy Carter, politicians were not the ones to fix the problem. It came from the streets and the suffering. Much like Gandhi and MLK Jr. did, several youth from this area, specifically Kool Herc (who was involved with a graffiti crew) and Afrika Bamabata (who was a known gang lord of initially The Savage Seven and then the Black Spades) sought out truth in their own lives and felt inspired to make a change in their neighborhoods.

It began initially by throwing large parties in their neighborhood. Now this sounds a bit risqué, but these parties were not centered on drugs and booze, they were around the turntables. Gandhi had his newspaper, MLK Jr. had his pulpit, and these leaders had their music as a forum to speak the truth. It started as a quick way to make a buck, but it began to break down social boundaries between territories. What it quickly developed into was a place where people felt empowered to express themselves and show their strengths. Young emees, breakers and artists flocked to a place that felt like home. And though it began as a method of self-preservation much like we have seen in our other spokespeople, it
developed into a movement with the ability to transform.

Today’s urban spokes people are the hip-hop artists: the djs, the emcees, the breakers, the graffiti artists. They reflect, analyze, critique and uplift what happens in the world around them. If one takes a second to ignore their initial dislike for the genre, one can find jewels of wisdom. You might have to turn off mainstream radio, but the truth and the soul force comes alive in the music. Stop and listen; it’s a new way to get in touch with satya.

Connecting youth to this culture allows them to see how social justice comes in many forms. If they are all to witness artists like Sage Francis, who adhere to their own personal vows, who are not afraid of speaking up and who beautifully articulate the picture of the world as it is, then students of today might find a spokesperson. If satyagraha works, and I believe it does, they will soon be inspired by the words of another and become their own spokesperson.

Oregon State Content Standards:
CCG: Listen to and Read Informational and Narrative Text:
Listen to, read, and understand a wide variety of informational and narrative text across the subject areas at school and on own, applying comprehension strategies as needed.

- EL.HS.RE.02 Listen to, read, and understand a wide variety of informational and narrative text, including classic and contemporary literature, poetry, magazines, newspapers, reference materials, and online information.
- EL.HS.RE.03 Make connections to text, within text, and among texts across the subject areas.
- EL.HS.RE.04 Demonstrate listening comprehension of more complex text through class and/or small group interpretive discussions across the subject areas.
- EL.HS.RE.05 Match reading to purpose—location of information, full comprehension, and personal enjoyment.
- EL.HS.RE.06 Understand and draw upon a variety of comprehension strategies as needed—re-reading, self-correcting, summarizing, class and group discussions, generating and responding to essential questions, making predictions, and comparing information from several sources.
- EL.HS.RE.07 Clearly identify specific words or wordings that are causing comprehension difficulties and use strategies to correct.

Suggested Teaching Activities:

Poker chip assimilation (credit to Dr. David Kirkland Columbia University):
The point of this activity is to feel what it is like to have no voice, to feel the struggle of having no control, to exercise what control you do of your own situation, to model and reflect on the structure of a capitalistic society, and to talk about our own language/power/voice.

Use the chips as the “wealth” in the mock society. This is a project that is subtle but
models the way we interpret “rich”, “free” and “communication”.

To start, there needs to be a facilitator, three “police”, three groups, three bags of poker chips (with enough for every participant to have three…though there should be more), a whiteboard to tally up scores and an area designated as the jail.

Only the facilitator should know that the bags are stacked so to speak so that Level 1 has higher level chips, Level 2 has more middle level and Level 3 has more lower level.

Instruct that there will be several rounds, but everyone must adhere to two rules: no cheating and no talking. Once everyone agrees and understands, you divvy up the poker chips so everyone has three, and you give them one minute to trade. During the first round, police send anyone to jail that breaks any of the rules. They must stay there until the round is over. The round consists of people trading coins to get a larger amount of points. When the round is over, in one minute, people calculate their individual points and track them on the board under their group number.

Green—50 points
Orange—25 points
Black—15 points
Blue—10 points
Red—5 points 3 of a kind: 5 bonus points
White—1 point Patriotic (red, white and blue) 10 bonus points

The facilitator then redistributes people into different groups based on their own individual totals, trying to balance groups: equal numbers per group but based on how their scores turned out, Group 1 (highest total), Group 2 (average) and Group 3 (lowest amount). The facilitator then allows Group 1 to make up a new rule, and then goes to Group 3 and gives them a “pep” talk about how one day they too may be able to “make it”. Everyone will play Round 2, adhering to Group 1’s new rule. All violators of said rule go to jail. (Repeat after each round).

Keep playing till the students bring about enough points to be able to debrief in an educational manner.

Close-readings of contemporary songs:
(KRS-1 “Me Man”, Blue Scholars “Joe Metro”, Patty Griffin “Up the Mountain”, “Let Freedom Ring”, Rage Against The Machine “Township Rebellion”; “What’s going on?” Marvin Gaye; “We didn’t start the fire” REM; “Fight the Power” Public Enemy; “Keep your eyes on the prize” Sweet Honey on the Rocks.) We will use a Marxist, Feminist and Critical Race Theory Lens to critique and compliment the artist on the truth they are able to bring forth in the piece.

Free-write response to digital story:
Use the visual/auditory piece to respond to (a) who people listen to as a “voice” (b) what is
it about that person that draws you to them: message, media, values (c) what do you project back out into the world.

**Watch Slingshot, Hip Hop/New Muslim Cool**  
Palestinian Hip Hop documentary that shows how youth today are able to overcome oppressive situations by reclaiming their identity, establishing truth and uniting through music.

**Reflection of lyrics that they feel are speaking to them and the greater audience:**  
Each student must pick a song where they feel the artist is shedding some truth about the world. How are they both observing and interpreting the world around them?

**Research project on an spokesperson of their choice (how they came to be):**  
They will conduct research on a contemporary artist of their choice (music/art/theatre/sport). They then must research the points in the artist’s life where they “spoke up”: about what? when? why? This is not your typical biography, rather they must start to get to the roots of how they reveal their identity and what they have to say about the world.

**Materials Needed:**
- Enough colored poker chips that everyone could have three of various colors and three bags to put them in.
- Documentaries
- Computer, Projector, Internet connections, Bookmarks of music and lyrics on Youtube.

**Bibliography:**


