Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”
Mahatma Gandhi

Title: Gandhi’s Habits of Mind; A Journey of Self Discovery

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
Any

Duration of Lesson:
An hour and beyond...

Content Standards:
Lincoln County School District: Instructional Coach Performance Evaluation Standards
2d: Establishing and maintaining norms of behavior for professional interactions
Instructional Coach has established clear norms of mutual respect for professional interaction.
Teachers ensure that their colleagues adhere to these standards of conduct.
4d: Participating in a professional community
Instructional Coach makes a substantial contribution to school and district events and projects
and assumes a leadership role with colleagues.

Lesson Abstract:
The Habits of Mind are the specific ways to help students mediate their thinking, and Gandhi’s
life story shows how to make it more relevant and applicable to our lives. These examples and
connections are just a few of the ways educators might use Gandhi’s legacy to inspire and
deepen student’s understanding and acquisition of the Habits of Mind that they need to be
compassionate and committed citizens.

Guiding Questions:
In what ways did Gandhi acquire the habits of nonviolence?
What are the habits of nonviolence that students might need to be humane, informed, literate
citizens that can take civic responsibility and advocate for their rights?

Content Essay:

Gandhi’s Habits of Mind
A Journey of Self- Discovery

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.” --Mahatma Gandhi
What connections might we make between Gandhi’s journey of nonviolence and social change and the Habits of Mind?

Gandhi developed practices of nonviolence throughout the course of his life. We might think of these practices as “habits” that he developed and practiced through reflection and we might find many parallels to the habits of mind research being implemented today. Not only did he acquire these habits for himself, he was also able to communicate and persuade masses of people, both within and without India, that the acquisition of these habits was essential to building a civilized society based on the notions of nonviolence or ahimsa. He also encouraged these ideals in education. According to Dr. Sethia:

Gandhi formulated his ideas of holistic education, which he called nai taleem or new education. It was aimed at mind-body-spirit development on the context of the child’s immediate environment.

He describes a wholehearted approach to learning and teaching. These notions on education can be strongly connected to the research that has evolved from the field of Cognitive Psychology.

**Habits of Mind**

Cognitive Psychologists, Bob Garmston and Art Costa have been researching and developing mental models for the Habits of Mind for successful people for over 30 years. Their research has shown that:

Habits of Mind are an identified set of 16 problem solving, life related skills, necessary to effectively operate in society and promote strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity and craftsmanship. The understanding and application of these 16 Habits of Mind serve to provide the individual with skills to work through real life situations that equip that person to respond using awareness (cues), thought, and intentional strategy in order to gain a positive outcome.

There are 16 Habits of Mind that they identify for successful, happy people. The number is not limited to these 16, these happen to be the ones that appear most often for living a whole-hearted life. These habits are: persisting, managing impulsivity, striving for accuracy, metacognition (thinking about your thinking), taking responsible risks, applying background knowledge to new situations, listening with empathy and understanding, questioning and problem posing, thinking flexibly, thinking interdependently, responding with wonderment and awe, remaining open to continuous learning, finding humor, creating, imagining and innovating, gathering data through all the senses, and finally, communicating with clarity and precision.

**Making Connections**

As educators, helping students become self-directed, interdependent, knowledgeable and compassionate citizens is a core component of the teaching profession. Using an expert text such as Gandhi’s life story, would serve as a catalyst for students as they make powerful and
impactful connections that deepen understanding and acquisition of the Habits of Mind. Some ways educators might use this text are explained in the following examples.

**Thinking Flexibly and Listening with Empathy and Understanding**

At an early age, Gandhi internalized the Habits of Mind of flexible thinking and listening with empathy and understanding. As Dr. Sethia describes, “Gandhi developed a sense of respect for religious pluralism as he sat through many conversations his father had with people from various religions, and he was particularly struck by the respect his father showed to these people from different faiths.” His father modeled these habits of acceptance at a most impressionable age and Gandhi could take these experiences and apply them to future situations.

**Managing Impulsivity**

As described by Dr. Sethia, Gandhi’s early experiences with a childhood friend, Sheikh Mehtab, he describes, “was a “tragedy” of his life. This friendship led Gandhi to eat meat and even to jeopardize his fidelity to his wife.” In this way, he was especially tested during his teenage years, as many of us are; we test who are we and who we want to become. The habit of managing impulsivity is most likely the strongest of the habits to break at this age. For Gandhi, this experience helped him develop a sense consciousness and inner control to manage his impulsivity, and to not give in to his desires and temptations.

Another defining moment time in Gandhi’s life, came when he stole from his father. The heartfelt and hard life lesson that he learned from his father transformed him. According to Dr. Sethia, in the note he confessed to stealing, he asked for his father’s forgiveness along with adequate punishment, and vowed to never steal again. Gandhi described this unforgettable experience of that moment that follows:

I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father. He read it through, and pearl drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note…I could see my father’s agony. If I were a painter, I could draw a picture of the whole scene today. Those pearl drops of love cleansed my heart and washed my sin away.

In this moment, Gandhi experienced cognitive shift; he was able to respond with wonderment and awe, in such a way that he was eternally convinced that he would never do this again. It was an experience of transformation for him. He knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he would be committed to his values of truthfulness.

**Perseverance**

As Dr. Sethia describes:

Gandhi took joy in serving his father as a nurse, giving him timely medications and massaging him at night. Not only did he not miss doing these chores even for a day, but he did so lovingly and as an act of service. He retired to bed only after his father fell to sleep.
This is an example of his commitment to his family and ability to persevere through difficult times. Beyond his immediate family, his lifelong commitment to his vision of Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule, particularly his the Salt March would be a powerful example of the ways Gandhi was able to persevere and shows the ways he was able to remain committed to his beliefs and convictions.

**Communicating with Clarity and Precision**

He developed the uncanny ability to communicate his thinking with clarity and precision that allowed everyone, poor and rich across India and the rest of the world the ability to understand and apply the notions of nonviolence. Dr. Sethia describes the ways Gandhi was able to communicate with clarity and precision prior to the Salt March:

Unlike most revolutionaries who were given to stealth as much as to violence, Gandhi alerted his adversaries by fully disclosing to them his plans in advance. And he did so by evoking in them a cooperative spirit and by communicating clearly that noncooperation and civil disobedience were his last resort.

This is just one example of many that teachers could draw from Gandhi’s life that highlight his gifts of clear communication. On a much broader scope and given more time, students might investigate sections of Gandhi’s ‘Hind Swaraj’ and Other Writings, or his autobiography to show students the power that our words might have to empower others.

**The Power of Metacognition**

“A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.” — Mahatma Gandhi

This quote sums up the power of reflection and metacognition. Gandhi was continually thinking about his thinking, sifting through options and pausing to take a look at situations and think how it might be impacting others. One of his most significant pieces of reflective thinking can be found in his Talisman, which is a masterful reflective tool that can be used to help filter through options in the decision making process.

Gandhi’s Talisman

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.

The Habits of Mind are the specific ways to help students mediate their thinking and become more self-directed; Gandhi’s life story shows how to make it more relevant and applicable to our lives. These examples and connections are just a few of the ways educators might use Gandhi’s legacy to inspire and deepen student’s understanding and acquisition of the Habits of Mind that
they need to be compassionate and committed citizens. Gandhi’s inspiration leaves us wondering with awe…what might be some ways we can apply these stories to our own lives and become more reflective, better listeners and ultimately more responsible, compassionate and caring citizens as well?

Bibliography

Lesson Plan
Habits of Mind and Gandhi
CHS Teachers
“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”
--Mahatma Gandhi

Facilitator: Jolene Lockwood
Learning Target: I can reflect on the qualities of happy students/people and collaborate to build my background knowledge on 2-3 Habits of Mind that might be most important for students to acquire/practice.
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<th>Time</th>
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| 1:00-1:30 | Opening          | Grounding: getting to know our collaborative team, *Read the quote from Gandhi, take 3 minutes to Free Write a response, take two minutes to share at your table the connections you are making to the quote.*  
Norms & agenda.  
Activate BK: ________________  
What might be some connections you are making? T-n-T |
| 1:30-2:00 | Crafting/Composing | **Graphic Organizer Step 1:** Write down all the things that see and hear happy and unhappy student’s doing. Once you have **constructed a list, make some chunks, from those chunks; make some connections to the habits of mind for success.**  
Share in your small groups, what are some common themes that are emerging?  
Read and annotate the excerpts on Gandhi. (For example, choose short excerpts from Gandhi’s early years for teachers to read or I might select Gandhi’s Talisman—it will depend on the audience.)  
What are some most important take-aways for you? What are some connections to the Habits of Mind you are making? **T-n-T Create a Framework for thinking; choose 2-3 HOM that seem most important at this time.** |
| 2:00-2:30 | Composing         | Expert groups; Choose one of the three habits that you would like to dig a bit deeper with. (Persistence, Managing Impulsivity, Metacognition, etc.) Create a poster using the Frayer Model modified graphic organizer |
| 2:30-2:45 | Debrief           | Share your chart and findings with the whole group |
| 2:45-3:00 | Next Step         | Suggests Brainstorm a list of possible next steps to take as a collaborative team. |

**Metacognitive Moment:** What is one Habit of Mind that you will be paying attention to in yourself for the next week?

**Quick Write on this prompt:**

- Think back to when you were a teenager. What were some defining moments for you, when were you the most happy and when were you the most disappointed in yourself?
- What were the habits that you learned along the way as a result of this event?
- Pick one habit of mind that sticks out for you the most. What might be some reasons you are feeling connected to this Habit at this time?
- Which habit would you like to be more intentional about?