Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title:
Leadership Characteristics of Gandhi and Cesar Chavez

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
8th Grade Leadership Class

Duration of Lesson:
50 minutes, 5 days

Content Standards: Washington State
History 4.3: Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events.
Social Studies 5.1: Uses critical reasoning skills to analyze and evaluate positions.
Communication 1.1: Uses listening and observation skills and strategies to focus attention and interpret information.

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson allows students to examine the lives of Gandhi and Chavez to identify characteristics of positive leaders. Youth today are bombarded by a variety of negative messages. By examining the lives of influential leaders and focusing on common character traits, students will be able to examine their own lives and begin to make positive personal choices.

Guiding Questions:
• What positive character traits do leaders such as Gandhi and Chavez have in common?
• How did Cesar Chavez and Gandhi demonstrate leadership qualities in the course of their journeys?
• How can students begin to recognize and nurture these characteristics at school, at home, and within themselves?

Content Essay:
MTV, video games, “reality” shows, celebrity gossip with its break-ups, rehabilitation, and even deaths. Our students today are bombarded with images and “news” pieces that continually promote a version of life and society that confuse and depress the soul. Numerous positive and life-giving leaders have emerged throughout history that present an alternative to this view of “reality.” The purpose of this lesson is to present information to students about the lifestyles of those who have influenced “for eternity” and provided a sustainable message of hope and nonviolence.

To begin with, it is necessary to understand how one becomes such a leader “for eternity.” In his work James C. Hunter suggests that true leaders use influence, not power, in their life work. This influence is developed through the eight essentials of leadership: patience, kindness, humility, respect, selflessness, forgiveness, honesty, and commitment. Once those
traits are in place, the leader can work to influence others through service and sacrifice. In tracing the journeys of the most influential leaders of history these traits resonate in the core of their beings.

One of the most familiar influential leaders was Mohandas K. Gandhi. Gandhi grew up in a fairly well-to-do household which practiced Hinduism, but also welcomed Muslims and Parsees into the home. This early grounding in religious traditions reinforced for him the importance of truth and service, as well as tolerance for many beliefs. The importance of honesty was tested at the age of twelve in the classroom. Gandhi had misspelled the word “kettle” on a test, given on a day an English educational inspector was visiting. The teacher gave hints and prompted him to copy from another student, hoping that his class would demonstrate perfection in the exam. Gandhi refused to cheat, demonstrating his personal integrity and honesty. Gandhi struggled with truthfulness with his parents as well. A friend tried to persuade him of the importance of eating meat by drawing upon the work of a local poet, Narmad:

“Behold the mighty Englishman,  
He rules the India small.  
Because being a meat-eater,  
He is five cubits tall.” (Quoted in Sethia, p. 15)

However, eating meat meant he could not eat at home and would have to lie to his parents. He elected to not eat meat while his parents lived so that he would not have to lie to them. This demonstrates both his honesty and his commitment to his principles. In England he became a vegetarian by choice after reading many books on the subject. He made a life-long commitment to this practice based on a moral rationale – the duty of humans is to not prey on fellow animals but to protect them. Throughout the rest of his life he remained a vegetarian.

Gandhi demonstrated patience in numerous ways over the course of his life. Shortly after his arrival in South Africa, Gandhi traveled to Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal, to work on a lawsuit. During his train journey, he was ejected from the train for traveling in the first class compartment. Although he had purchased the ticket for that compartment, only white passengers were allowed. His first reaction was anger, but Gandhi reflected and chose not to pursue legal action. Instead he worked to find the root cause of the color prejudice in South Africa and worked to bring about solutions to burning issues there. In the words of Dr. Tara Sethia: “Gandhi focused on three aspects: learning about the history of Indian immigration in South Africa and the causes of color prejudice there; working on the Indian community; and working for the Indian community.” (Sethia, p. 36) During the course of his years in South Africa he effected change through his newspaper, representation of indentured laborers, and organization of the Natal Indian Congress. This work consumed years of his life, demonstrating his patience and commitment to the process. It was also a transforming experience in his life, clarifying for him what he considered his human destiny, self-realization attained through community service. This service had to be rendered selflessly, another important characteristic of influential leaders.

The life of Cesar Chavez epitomizes commitment and selflessness in a myriad of ways. Chavez was born to a fairly well off Mexican American family. Unfortunately, their home in Yuma, Arizona, was lost due to back taxes. His family became migrant workers, surviving at times due to the kindness of others. He spent his days working the fields, crawling in the dust, choking on the chemical sprays, rather than in the classroom as most children his age. His family remained intact, with the religion of his mother a steady influence and guiding presence. These early experiences grounded him for the work to come. After serving in the military, he
returned to marry and begin his own family life. Living in poverty with his wife and children, he dreamed of a better future. At this critical point he was approached by Fred Ross, who worked for Community Services Organization. This agency had developed service projects for inner-city Mexican-Americans. The life work of Chavez had begun. (Ingram, p. 99) Chavez was asked to help organize farm workers into a CSO chapter, thereby providing a catalyst for the workers to help themselves in securing better living and working conditions. He took to the work wholeheartedly, even studying in his spare time to learn how to better serve his community. He was heavily influenced by the work of Gandhi and began to understand the role of nonviolence. Chavez demonstrated patience as he met with individuals, organized sit-ins and pickets, and built a pyramid of workers. He knew gaining better working conditions for farm workers would not happen overnight, but put the foundation in place and steadily worked toward the goals. “Chavez suggests that through nonviolent struggle certain kinds of truth are revealed about social injustice. But this revelation is something that can only unfold over time.” (Orosco, p. 107) Chavez sacrificed much along the way. He gave up his job with the CSO to begin the National Farm Workers Association. He could not receive any money but was supported solely by his wife in the beginning. This commitment continued throughout the years of the historic grape boycott from 1965-70. Chavez never lost faith in the cause. His dedication even led him to fast for twenty-five days to reinforce the importance of achieving results through nonviolent means. Consumers began to understand the problems of farm workers, and 17 million of them stopped buying grapes. The growers had to concede to the workers and contracts were negotiated that for the first time insured better working conditions and wages. The union had won recognition due to the selflessness and commitment of Chavez.

After reflecting on the lives of these two leaders, students are ready to begin the process of integrating the characteristics of leaders into their own lives. The goal of such a process is “self-actualization,” a state of equanimity wherein one’s outward life is in balance with one’s inward values. In the classroom setting that process involves much discussion, definition and examples, and opportunities to practice the principles of these characteristics. The challenge as an educator is to take values that are intangible and make them more concrete in the minds of their students. Students require hands-on experiences where they can wrestle with the meanings and implications of these characteristics. It is imperative for teachers to have already established a “safe” climate, one where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and feelings. Once that foundation is in place, with the background of information about leaders shared, students are ready to begin the work. Some of the work may be deeper, some more surface level, but each experience draws students further into the process of integrating values. Making posters, providing opportunities for self-reflection, exploration into lives of leaders, making and recording observations, as well as other activities allow students to explore the possibilities of transformation that these words can bring into their lives and into the life of the school.

Sharing with students the lives of leaders like Gandhi and Chavez provides an alternative to the mainstream messages of their daily lives. If we are to have any hope for a sustainable future, our youth must learn how to live in such a way that their lives have meaning and purpose. Examining the traits of leaders such as patience, selflessness, and commitment provides a direction that can lead students along their personal journeys of self-actualization.
Bibliography:


Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:

Day 1:

Materials needed: Questions for ice breaker
- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Information on the 8 Essentials of Leadership

Begin with an activity designed to help students learn more about each other.

- EX: Way-In: ½ of the class forms an inside circle facing out and ½ the class forms an outside circle facing in (partners). Teacher reads a fun get to know you question and gives the tandem approximately 1min. to answer and then says switch. Have one circle move one spot to the right or left and ask the next question. (Example: “If you could be any animal what would you be and why?”) *I usually come up with a fun way for the partners to close their conversation like a fist bump or handshake with a fun “Nice to meet ya!"

Break the class into small groups.

Have each group begin by introducing themselves to each other. The task: brainstorm a definition of a leader. Once they have agreed on the definition, then their task is to create that leader. They must use the butcher paper and markers and draw the leader….using an outline of the body, fill in the body with words, phrases, pictures, images, that represent what a leader is. Share the leaders created and discuss common characteristics.

James C. Hunter suggests that Leadership is the “skill of influencing people to enthusiastically work toward goals identified as being for the common good, with character that inspires confidence.” This is how we act in love toward others.

Utilizing the list of ideas and words they provided look for patterns and begin circling each of what James Hunter suggests are the 8 essential characteristics to Servant Leadership: **Patience, Kindness, Humility, Respect, Selflessness, Honesty, Commitment, and Forgiveness.**

On a clean piece of paper write the 8 essentials and begin working with the group to define each word.
Exit slip: students write on a piece of paper which of these essentials is most important in their lives, either because they use it daily or because they need it.

Day 2:
Materials needed: Digital Storyboard “What Makes a Leader?”
Begin with an activity designed to help students learn more about each other.

- Ex: “I have friends who…” Have students sitting or standing in a circle and one student comes to the middle of the circle and finishes the statement, “I have friends who…” (Keeping it appropriate) if the statement applies to any student in the group then they have to move to a new spot in the circle and the person in the middle fills in one of the empty spots. The last person to find a spot in the circle is in the middle. Rule: Every statement made has to also apply to the person saying and there is no intentionally calling people out specifically.

Begin with class discussion and brainstorm. Ask the question: Who are the most influential leaders of all time? Write a list that has two columns, but don’t explain the columns at first. These names may include:

- Gandhi
- Mother Teresa
- Martin Luther King, Jr
- Jesus Christ
- Mohammad
- Cesar Chavez
- Hitler
- Lenin
- Stalin
- Saddam Hussein
- Osama Bin Laden
- Napoleon

Discuss the difference between the two sides, leading to the concept of leadership by influence versus leadership by power. Have students share what they know about various leaders listed.

Show the Digital Story titled: “What Makes a Leader?”
Discuss the images and concepts from the storyboard. What characteristics were apparent in leaders from the presentation? What characteristics seem most influential and long-lasting?

Ask them to choose someone from the power list (let’s go with Hitler for now), and then ask them how many of the 8 Essentials Hitler demonstrated in his life. (Note: Hitler was very committed, but his motive was fear rather than love.) Then choose someone from the influence list and ask the same question. For example, was Gandhi patient, kind, etc.? Note the contrast. Point out that power is an ability that can be given or taken away. By contrast authority/influence is a skill that can be learned, which is built by serving and sacrificing. It must be earned.

Exit Slip: Students think about a leader in their personal lives. On a piece of paper they write three columns. In the first column is the name, in the second the service offered, and in the third the sacrifice required. Two examples:

- Mom: Driving me to soccer practice, Her time when she could work out
- Teacher: Tutoring me after school, His time when he could grade papers
Day 3:
Materials needed:
- Candy
- Poster board
- Markers
- Computers
- Additional texts as resources if available

Begin with an activity designed to help students learn more about each other.
EX: Candy Ice Breaker
Put about enough candy in a bowl for each person in the room to take at least 5 pieces, (for larger groups take 3). Tell the students they can each grab 1-5 pieces of candy. After each person has their candy, they have to tell something about themselves for each piece of candy they took. So, if I took 5 pieces I’d have to tell 5 things about myself. Once everyone has shared you may eat the candy.

Internet investigation: (plus additional books as available)
Assign students into small groups to research the lives of four of the leaders from the list yesterday. Personally select which four: Gandhi, Chavez, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King.
Their task, come back to the group and share significant pieces with the whole class. Create a poster that illustrates:
- Who was this person and when did s/he do his/her work?
- Where this person did his/her work?
- What were significant events in his/her life?
- What significant accomplishments is this person known for?
- How did this person accomplish his/her work?
- What happened to this person?

Note: this is a BRIEF outline, just giving enough information to move forward on the learning.
Share what they have learned by the end of class.

Exit slip: One significant learning about the person assigned

Day 4:
Materials needed:
- Computers
- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Surveys

Begin with an activity designed to help students learn more about each other.
Ex: I’ve done something you haven’t.
Begin by sharing something you have done that you don’t think anyone else has done. If someone else has done it, they have to stand up. If not, explain more. Have someone else share when they are ready. It’s a fun pop-up activity to throw in anytime and kids get to share unknown facts about their lives.
Today’s lesson focuses on the 8 Essential Characteristics of leaders: patience, kindness, honesty, respect, selflessness, forgiveness, humility and commitment.
First, divide students into eight groups. Each group will take one of the characteristics. Their task is to research quotes about their word. They are to make posters to hang around the school and perhaps use as morning announcements.

Exit slip: HOMEWORK: Students are to keep a record of observations from our school and homes. For the next day they are to record instances where they observed each of the character traits being used. For example, “during second period I saw Sam do an act of kindness by giving Sally a pencil to use.” A chart could be created as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Trait</th>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>What happened?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day 5:
Materials needed: work from previous days and paper for recording
Begin with an activity:
Group Juggle

Group passes objects through the air and says the name of person with whom you are throwing. Add objects, go faster, and/or no talking will increase the difficulty of additional rounds. Koosh balls, small stuffed animals, and bean bags work well for this activity. (Underhand throws only, please.)

TO LEAD ACTIVITY:
1. Stand in a circle with hands out to catch the object. When you catch the object, put your hands down so you can tell who still needs to receive it once. As leader, you start it and also catch it last.
2. Leader starts by calling a person’s name, making eye contact, and throwing them the object. That person then catches the object and says “Thank you, ______”. They then throw to someone else by calling their name and making eye contact. Again, they say “Thank you, ______”. The “thank yous” help the group learn names.
3. As the leader sizes up the group, they can add more objects into the mix. This gets several objects flying at the same time. Sometimes it’s easier if you stop the thank yous at this point or it gets too crazy. Other options... go backwards or send one backwards and one forward at the same time.

Lesson: Debrief learning from the week. Review posters and school/home observations. What was learned in the course of the week? Where do we go from here? How can we implement these characteristics in our school and in our homes? Allow students to lead the discussion and brainstorming. From the list begin to develop a class action plan. Have students develop personal plans...what can they do at their homes to show the eight essential characteristics?

Exit slip: Students pledge to work on one trait: which one, where, and how?