# Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

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<th><strong>Title of Lesson:</strong></th>
<th>Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi: Catalysts of Social Change</th>
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<td><strong>Lesson By:</strong></td>
<td>Carol M. Lukens</td>
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<td><strong>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class Size:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>High School U.S. History</td>
<td>20-25 students</td>
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## Goals/Objectives of Lesson:

- Students will read and summarize articles on the lives and work of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi.
- Students will participate in small group discussions to compare and contrast the lives of each historical figure.
- Students will understand the meaning of nonviolence by comparing and contrasting nonviolent qualities and behaviors of each historical figure on a Venn diagram.
- Students will be given the opportunity to apply the concept of nonviolence to their own lives and/or communities by developing a service project to implement throughout the semester.

## Lesson Abstract:

The purpose of this lesson is to teach high school students about Dorothy Day as a notable figure in U.S. history, and how her life and dedication to nonviolence compared with the model exemplified by Mohandas K. Gandhi. Using cooperative learning with a possible service learning component, students will discover that commitment to nonviolence and service to others offers both personal and societal transformation.

## Lesson Content:

The historical figures of Dorothy Day in the United States and Mohandas K. Gandhi in South Africa and India are compared and contrasted, with an emphasis on their commitment to nonviolence. This lesson causes students to examine and reflect on the power of nonviolence and its role in helping to effect social change in the 20th century, and raises awareness of the role of gender, ethnicity and economics in politics and social change.

1. If students have previously learned about Dorothy Day as part of a U.S. History unit, this lesson may take place subsequent to an out of class reading assignment wherein the students read a biography of Mohandas K. Gandhi (by Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Service, http://www.gandhiserve.org/whos_gandhi.html), followed with the “The Nonviolent Witness of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi” listed in the appendix.
2. If students have not previously learned about Dorothy Day, this lesson may take place subsequent to out of class reading assignments on both (Day biography by Jim Forest, located at http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/ddbiographytext.cfm?Number=72 and Gandhi biography by Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Service, located at http://www.gandhiserve.org/whos_gandhi.html), followed with “The Nonviolent Witness of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi” listed in the appendix.

In either case, this lesson will be followed with a written essay requiring students to apply what they have learned.

**Wisconsin Social Studies Standards:**

- **B.12.8** History Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Students will recall, select, and explain the significance of important people, their work, ideas in the areas of political and intellectual leadership, inventions, discoveries, and the arts, within each major area of Wisconsin, United States and world history.

- **C.12.10** Political Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Students will identify ways people may participate effectively in community affairs and the political process.

- **C.12.16** Political Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Students will describe the evolution of movements to assert rights by people with disabilities, ethnic and racial groups, minorities, and women.

- **E.12.2** Behavioral Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Students will explain how such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, family, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, attitudes, beliefs, work, and motivation contribute to individual identity and development.

- **E.12.12** Behavioral Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Students will explain current and past efforts of groups and institutions to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups such as women, children, the elderly, and individuals who are disabled.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What were the social and political problems these individuals faced and wanted to change?
- In which ways were they similar to and different from each other (including philosophy, lifestyle, era, age, country of activism)
- What means did they use to achieve their goals?
- What value did nonviolence have to them in their strategies for social change?
• How did they utilize the power of nonviolence?
• What personal sacrifices did they make in working for social change?
• Which groups of society were they especially concerned with?
• How big or small was the scope of their work?
• What did they each achieve? Provide examples. Did they achieve what they wanted to?
• Reflect on the relevance of nonviolence in your everyday life. Are there things you do that reflect those qualities? What could you do to become a better leader in nonviolence?
• Who are leaders in our community? Are there ways they show that they are committed to nonviolence?

Materials Needed:

• 25 copies of biographies of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dorothy Day
• 25 copies of Summary Information to Compare and Contrast the Lives of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi (in appendix)
• 25 copies of Venn diagram (in appendix)
• Large white sheets of “post-it” paper for group work
• Markers to use with “post-it” paper

Lesson Context:

This lesson may fit into a larger unit of study on women in early 20th century U.S. History, Women’s Suffrage, or social movements.

Teaching Activities:

Prior to this lesson, if students have previously learned about Dorothy Day, they will be given a copy of and assigned to read a biography of Mohandas K. Gandhi along with “The Nonviolent Witness of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi.” If they have not previously learned about Dorothy Day, students will be given a copy of and assigned to read biographies of both historical figures along with “The Nonviolent Witness of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi.”

At the beginning of the class period, students will count off and join into groups of four. They will be given fifteen minutes to discuss as a group the lives of both Day and Gandhi, and complete a Venn diagram on a large white sheet of “post-it” paper comparing and contrasting the philosophy and nonviolent activities of each. Students may also use information from the group to complete their own individual Venn diagrams on the hand-outs to keep as notes for future use.
After all groups have completed their Venn diagrams, a representative from each group will post his/her group’s diagram on the board. After each group has explained their diagram, we will finish with a discussion and questions.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of nonviolence by answering the following questions in a one-two page written essay, to be completed outside of class:

- How was each leader a catalyst for social change? How did he/she impact the world through nonviolence?
- Are there things you do that reflect qualities of either or both leaders? What could you do to become a better leader in nonviolence?
- Who are leaders in our community? Are there ways they show that they are committed to nonviolence?
- Would you vote for a peacemaker like Dorothy Day or Mohandas K. Gandhi to become president of America? Why or why not?

A rubric may be used to evaluate the essay.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment:**

- Bring in a speaker presently living and working in a Catholic Worker-based community.
- Have students develop a service project (this can be alone or with a group) that implements (within or outside of the school) specific nonviolent actions to raise awareness of injustices and help create social change.

**Bibliography:**


The Catholic Worker Movement. http://www.catholicworker.org/


Appendix

The Nonviolent Witness of Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi

Dorothy Day and Mohandas K. Gandhi were contemporaries and advocates of nonviolent change. Examination of their similarities and differences provides a rich field of reflection on the theory and practice of nonviolence.

Day and Gandhi lived on different continents. Yet they both experienced deep personal difficulties. And both learned from those difficulties to empathize with and advocate for the powerless – especially the poor.

Dorothy Day, born in Brooklyn, New York, 1897, experienced her first real hardship at the age of nine when her family was forced to move across country because her father was out of work. Jim Forest, in his biography notes, “Day’s understanding of the shame people feel when they fail in their efforts dated from this time.”1 Thus, her own poverty was undoubtedly central in her lifelong work to effect social change advocating for the poor and oppressed.

Though Mohandas K. Gandhi experienced loss when young, he was older than Day when first feeling social oppression. Born in Porbander, India, 1869, his father died while Gandhi was yet in school. At 13 he married, and later, after leaving wife and son behind to obtain a law degree in England, Gandhi became a legal adviser in South Africa. There, where Indians had no political rights and were often referred to derogatorily as “coolies,” Gandhi witnessed racism firsthand. On a train, though holding a first-class ticket, he was thrown from his car by European railway workers. As the Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Foundation relates, “From this political awakening Gandhi was to emerge as the leader of the Indian community.”2 In seeking independence for his people and striving to live the truth (satyagraha) through nonviolence (ahimsa) and love, he also became a catalyst for social change.

While Day and Gandhi lived during roughly the same era, examination of their lives also reveals significant differences. Not only their genders, but the different continents on which they lived affected the context of their lives. Because Indians in South Africa and India alike lived under colonialism, Gandhi devoted himself to helping free the masses from imperial rule and striving for unity among ethnicities. Since Day lived in the United States, an ever-emerging imperial power, her work was not to free the masses from an external power but rather from the oppressiveness of her own nation, yet one that she loved. This was exemplified in her work for the poor, activism on behalf of women’s voting rights, labor rights, the civil rights movement, and especially anti-militarism.

These differences were significant yet make their similarities all the more striking. Perhaps most important were their passion for justice and nonviolence, a hope to effect social transformation,

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and a belief that that transformation had to begin with the masses. As Forest explains quoting Day, “The class structure is our making and by our consent, not God’s, and we must do what we can to change it. We are urging revolutionary change.” Louis Fischer likewise depicts Gandhi’s early vision for the masses of India: “Village uplift was Gandhi’s First Freedom. Over 80 per cent of India lived in her villages, and they were poor, illiterate, diseased, discouraged. Peasant liberation from destitution could not be the achievement of the small upper class or a gift of the foreign power. The peasants had to win it. Gandhi craved for his country a psychological metamorphosis which would give it inner freedom and, then, inevitably, outer freedom, for once the people acquired individual dignity they would insist on better living and nobody would hold them in bondage.”

Each aimed to empower the vulnerable and oppressed, but neither believed violence should be used to effect social change. Day and Gandhi both felt it important to challenge injustices and even break unjust laws using acts of nonviolent civil disobedience, but they were also prepared to suffer and, incidentally, even expected it. In acts of conscience each was jailed frequently for participating in marches, boycotts, and civil disobedience aimed to challenge unjust laws.

Spirituality was another value that helped both continue their work despite many difficulties. It fed their passion and supported them in a commitment to the power of love. As Gandhi notes in his fundamental writing, *Hind Swaraj*, “The force of love is the same as the force of the soul or truth… The universe would disappear without the existence of that force.” Gandhi exemplified love in his care for the poor as did Day. As Cortright explains in quoting Day, “True faith, she said, is expressed in our love for others, especially our love for the ‘least of these.’”

Both also used the pen to work for justice. Day, an avid writer, began the Catholic Worker movement with her friend, Peter Maurin. As Mary Evelyn Jegen asserts, “Its houses of hospitality and its penny a copy newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, which reached a circulation of 100,000… became a major vehicle of spreading Catholic social teaching from the time of the depression of the 1930’s to the present.” Through it, Day raised awareness of many social ills.

Gandhi, too, wrote voluminously, using the word to spread his message of nonviolence and love. His collected works comprise 100 volumes, and in addition to letters and postcards, Gandhi published numerous newspapers. Along with public activism, therefore, Day and Gandhi employed writing as a powerful means to challenge the social order and urge systemic change.

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3 Forest.
5 Forest; Fischer, pp. 45, 46, 71-72, 100, 107, 146.
7 Cortright, p. 104.
9 Forest.
http://www.peacemagazine.org/archive/v03n3p24.htm; Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Service.
Community was important to both as illustrated by Day’s houses of hospitality and Gandhi’s ashrams. “Catholic Worker” houses sprung up around the country to accommodate the needs of the homeless following Day’s newspaper circulation. These communities in which Day lived and took care of the poor attracted both old and young who wished to help further the work of peacemakers.\(^{11}\) Many Catholic Worker communities remain in existence today.

Gandhi’s ashrams likewise attracted all ages. According to Narayan Desai, who lived at Gandhi’s Sabarmati ashram as a child, they were a “place for community life, where people lived together…worked together –young and old, men and women- in different kinds of work.”\(^ {12}\) All had dignity there and all activities were shared. Hence, both placed themselves very much in the center of the world, particularly the center of the poor and most vulnerable.

Because of their witness to nonviolence, each was revered by many. Gandhi was commonly referred to as the “Mathatma” or Great Soul, and Day often revered as a saint. Yet neither approved of the titles since both were perhaps only too aware of their humanness. As Fischer notes of Gandhi, “Saddened by his empty glorification, Gandhi wrote, ‘I am no Mahatma. My Mahatmaship is worthless.’ He would have preferred Indians to follow in his footsteps rather than kiss his feet. He wanted help, not acclaim and adoration.”\(^ {13}\) And as Cortright and Forest both confirm with Day’s words, “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed so easily.”\(^ {14}\)

Though neither is now living, Day and Gandhi were each catalysts for social change as indicated in the legacies they left behind. Day, with Catholic Worker houses internationally and regular issues of *The Catholic Worker* still in circulation.\(^ {15}\) Her witness lives on in the efforts of these communities to feed the hungry, provide for the poor and give voice to the voiceless.

As for Gandhi, his people did achieve freedom. Though official independence was attained on August 15, 1947, most important to Gandhi was the inner freedom they acquired in 1930 when he engaged international publicization of horrendous violence done to them by the British during their nonviolent raid of the Dharsana Salt Works.\(^ {16}\) That inner freedom gave them the needed hope to continue striving for complete independence from a colonial power. His legacy of living the truth and nonviolent love is evidenced by the many subsequent movements for social change that have modeled themselves on Gandhi’s way.

In studying these two peacemakers we will be rewarded with greater wisdom. If we then use that wisdom to transform our lives and relationships with others, our school, families and community will benefit from learning more peaceful ways of settling conflicts and pursuing peace.

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\(^{11}\) McCarthy, p. 32.

\(^{12}\) Desai, p. 24.

\(^{13}\) Fischer, p. 82.

\(^{14}\) Cortright, p. 106; Forest.

\(^{15}\) The Catholic Worker Movement. http://www.catholicworker.org/

\(^{16}\) Fischer, pp. 31, 100-102.
Comparing and Contrasting