Ahimsa Center K-12 Institute Lesson Plan

What Would Gandhi Tweet?
Fanny Machado – Creekside Middle School – Castro Valley, CA

Grade Level/Subject Area(s): 6-8th Grade English/Writing

Duration of Lesson: 30-60 minutes, 5-7 days

Relevant State/National/ Common Core Standards:  
Common Core Writing 6.1a Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.

Lesson Abstract:

Gandhi was a staunch critic of modern western civilization, but appreciated and even used aspects of civilization to suit his needs. In today’s social media and internet obsessed world, would Gandhi use social media to reach the masses and send his message or would he encourage us to step away from technology?

Guiding questions:

How did Gandhi see his role as a communicator? How did he use media sources available to him in order to disseminate his message to the masses? What would be Gandhi’s view on modern technology and would he use modern technology to communicate his message to the world?

Content Essay

Gandhi’s impact on India and the world at large is unarguably due to his ability to communicate his message to the world. Gandhi had an innate ability to inspire through both his words and actions. The challenges of disseminating information to large groups of people in the early twentieth century are clearly apparent through modern twenty-first century eyes. The technological advances of the twenty-first century make mass communication at a global level accessible at the touch of a button; a blessing or curse, unavailable to Gandhi during his time. As Gandhi found himself pondering the questions that drove his journey toward truth, his sense of justice forced his hand to communicate his truth to Indians. Gandhi used various forms of communication available to him at the time, including newspaper editorials, letter writing, face to face communications, spreading his message through educating those around him, and communicating his beliefs through his actions. Gandhi’s need to communicate, led him to facilitate the launching of the Indian Opinion in 1903. The Indian Opinion, Gandhi began his rapid ascent into the humanitarian platform. Through newspapers Gandhi wrote articles to instill a sense of responsibility and action for Indians in South Africa, while educating white South Africans of the suffering experienced by his people in their country. He believed that journalism was a form of service his community and asserted that service throughout his life. As a result of his early written work, Gandhi managed to inspire and educate the Indian populous. Later, Gandhi used his writings to mobilize people and to campaign against the injustices he saw in both South Africa and India. He used whatever means of communication were available to him
Gandhi published his written work regularly, including the publication of his autobiography and Hind Swaraj, his most seminal work. In addition he often wrote letters to friends and colleagues discussing his work and progress. In the spirit of transparency, he regularly wrote to British political figures to notify them of his intentions at every turn. In February of 1930 Gandhi announced his intentions to break the salt law in India. This announcement was followed by the Salt Satyagraha; a march that began with seventy-eight Satyagrahis and ended 241 miles later with thousands joining the march. Such was the power of Gandhi’s message. He possessed the savvy to effectively communicate by educating people in his ashram, by speaking to individuals in their homes and villages, by writing letters, and writing to newspapers. Although Gandhi was a harsh critic of modern western civilization, he did accept that there were aspects of it that he both appreciated and used to serve his needs. While he felt that some forms of western civilization were to be assimilated, he was concerned with people’s lack of concern for spiritual welfare and service to community. He believed that people were becoming lazy and were rapidly forgetting the joy that comes from and through physical labor. Gandhi closely predicted technological changes that his future would encounter:

“Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motorcar will be waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished-up food. Everything will be done by machinery” (Hind Swaraj, 1997, p35)

Gandhi’s feelings that modern western civilization was the cancer of India and the Indian spirit begs the question: how would Gandhi feel about the technological advances of our world today? The changes in technology have made the ability to communicate with one another whether near or far, accessible with the touch of a button. How many more people would a figure like Gandhi touch by using the internet or social media to spread his message? Additionally, it is worth considering whether his message would get lost in the fray of the vast network that is today’s media. It is difficult to ascertain whether Gandhi’s message would reach more people worldwide or whether his powerful message would get lost among the unlimited number of causes that are continuously bombarding our society for attention. Would Gandhi find the internet and media sources useful as a way to spread his message? With the advent of the internet, email and social media: Indeed, what would Gandhi tweet?

There is no doubt that Gandhi possessed excellent marketing skills. His ability to reach people through available media during a time where communication moved at a fraction of the speed with which it moves today, is impressive. It is possible to ascertain that through the internet and social media Gandhi would have had the ability to reach far more people than through other means. The question remains, whether he would have considered the internet to be another problem of modern western civilization. The internet, and in particular, social media has bred a new crop of youth that trivializes suffering around the world. Much of today’s youth finds more importance in posting pictures of themselves and their friends, over understanding the suffering that goes on in the world around them. Tweeting every trivial move they make drives the meaninglessness of their lives and following the Satyagraha movement would seem impossible to the majority of them.
On the other hand, it is important to communicate with people through a media source that is accessible and familiar. Through the internet, Gandhi would have been able to publish his work in real time. Reaching millions of people at once would allow for mass distribution of both his message and movement. The occupy movement, global democracy, student movements, and countless others rapidly gained momentum through social media. Modern society has proven time and again that it can use social media and the internet to organize everything from marches for social justice to boycotts of products and companies. In a world that relies on immediate communication, it can be argued that Gandhi would have been best served to log on to his twitter account to inform future Satyagrahis of their duty to fellow man. We can only guess how Gandhi would have navigated the world-wide-web, but it’s a certainty that Gandhi’s message is as powerful today as it was last century.

**Bibliography:**

**Teaching Activities:**
Day 1: Free write – What are your main chosen forms of communication? How do you express your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs to others? Once the students have had time to write they will share in groups their answers and share out with the rest of the class.
Day 2: Divide students into groups. Create a list of the different types of information sources available in today’s media. How do people get their message and information across to different audiences?
Day 3: group research – Students will stay in their groups to research at the school library. What were the forms of communication available in the early 1900s? How did people get their message across to others?
Day 4: Diagram. Have students create a diagram based on the different types of communication today and the early 1900s. What are the main differences between the two?
Day 5: Research/notes – Students will individually research the main beliefs held by Gandhi about what he called “modern western civilization”? Use the internet and library books available on Gandhi for research materials
Day 6-8: Students will write 3 blog entries as if they were Gandhi.