**Title of Lesson:** Gandhi's "Good Life"-- Stuff: What's it all about?

**Lesson By:** Michele Milner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>25 Students</td>
<td>10-14 one hour lessons</td>
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**Lesson Goals and Objectives:**

- **Cultivate awareness** so that students begin to understand themselves and the world around them in an empowering and compassionate way
  - Daily breathing, meditation or yoga exercises
  - Reflective conversation, thought, choices and activities based on students' consumption compared to global trends in wealth distribution
  - Critically analyze philanthropy

- **Explore the concept of materialism** by understanding the relationship to and identification with things
  - Understand Gandhi's perspective of materialism
  - Document the quantity of things students have and how they use them
  - Understand the level of satisfaction students derive from their things, especially vis-à-vis relationships and actions

- **Explore the concept of sustainability** by investigating the origins of things and the footprint these things leave on the planet (from resources to recycling or landfills)
  - Research the materials, energy and labor needed to create and dispose a personal item

- **Examine the idea of "what is enough?" in a personal and global context**
  - Understand Gandhi's perspective on this issue
  - Compare the quantity of possessions of people from other cultures to themselves
  - Question their desires
  - Explore how acquisition of things fits into consumerism
  - Analyze how consumerism is part of a capitalist society
  - Create a framework for determining how to consume responsibly
  - Determine a global ideal for wealth distribution

- **Analyze the role of philanthropy**
  - Question whether it is enough to give or if systemic changes are needed

**Lesson Abstract:**
The purpose of this lesson is to use a Gandhian lens to analyze critically materialism in a capitalist society. Gandhi's philosophy as well as the students' own burgeoning conceptions of truth will be applied to how the students make consumer choices in order to understand the ramifications of their choices for themselves, labor and natural resources.

**Lesson Content:**
Awareness
Gandhi repeatedly urged people to "turn the searchlight inward." Students will experience this process through experimentation with meditation, breathing, yoga, and journal writing.
Awareness grounds students, asks them to pause from their everyday business, and helps students understand themselves and their surroundings.

**Materialism**

Gandhi criticized western style industrialization and capitalism. He believed that the state intervenes to appropriate public wealth to the wealthy from the poor through laws as well as the capital structure. Any surplus created by the laboring masses flows in an uneven distribution to the minority rich. In addition, this system is based on an insatiable desire for material things that are not necessary and are an affront to simplicity. Gandhi's notion is that, "the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest" and that as long as the people in control of the surplus capital do not act as trustees and distribute it to those with less, the entire system, which is sustained through violence, should be indicted. His solution partly lies in the following:

If they want to shun the evils of capital, . . . they would attain a juster distribution of the products of labor. This takes us to contentment and simplicity, voluntarily adopted. Under the new outlook multiplicity of material wants will not be the aim of life, the aim will be rather their restriction consistently with comfort. *We shall cease to think of getting what we can, but we shall decline to receive what all cannot get.*

This transformation requires a long revolution in order to attain *purna swaraj* or an integrated democracy that partly presupposes a critical mass has undergone personal *swaraj* or transformation and attained a level of self-control and liberation. This personal *swaraj* would employ "satyagraha" or a nonviolent movement motivated by love or soul force to enact societal transformation. While all of these stages have been explained in a linear mode, it would be more accurate to say the means is as transformative as the end and equally important, and furthermore, there is an interactive dynamic between the *swaraj* employing satyagraha in order to reach *purna swaraj*, one state of being informing and affecting the other in ever-widening webs, inevitably attracting others to gravitate toward the truth.

In all of this, there is an element of self-sacrifice because the *swaraj* must reject unequal materialistic benefits and become a trustee to distribute wealth justly.

Gandhi also criticized machine-driven production to the extent that it renders people unemployed and thereby stripped of their dignity. People are entitled to employment and, indeed have the responsibility to work. This is partly why he started the *khadi* movement in which he beseeched Indians to spin their own cloth and reject the machine made material from the west.

The difference between Gandhi and a Marxist analysis of industrial capitalist societies is the nonviolent nature of a Gandhian approach as well as a basic assumption that human nature compels us to help our neighbors; we are not merely self-interested. Furthermore, Gandhi puts forth a deep respect for individual expression unlike Marx.
Finally, while Gandhi despised the modern western industrial capitalist system, he held hope for the people within the system; he consistently separated the people and the system that drives people to live unjustly or in a state of untruth.

By examining their personal choices, students will learn about the Gandhian critique in a very personal and relevant way.

Sustainability
Since the premise of capitalism is unfettered acquisition, natural resources are being used at an alarming and unsustainable rate. In addition, labor is often exploited in order to produce cheap goods that consumers throw away when their novelty wears off or when they break. Disposal can consist of sending the stuff to landfills, recycling or reusing.

Philanthropy
Giving, in the Melinda and Bill Gates mode of millions of dollars to help poor people, shows a degree of trusteeship that Gandhi promoted. A Gandhian critique of this type of giving is that it does not address systemic issues of the grotesque gap between the poor and the rich. A Gandhian system equalizes the distribution of surplus goods and promotes simplicity (reduction in desire for goods), while maintaining dignity and respect for individuals. As Gandhi stated, 
"(c)ivilization in the real sense consists not in the multiplicity of wants, but in the deliberate reduction in wants. Inordinate wants obscure both basic needs and deeper human aspirations."

Endnotes can be found at the end of this lesson.

School Content Standards:
California School Content Standards 10.3
Grade 10 World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World
Students develop an understanding of current world issues and relate them to their historical, geographic, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Students consider multiple accounts of events in order to understand international relations from a variety of perspectives.

- Understand the connections among natural resources, entrepreneurship, labor, and capital in an industrial economy.

- Analyze the emergence of capitalism as a dominant economic pattern and the responses to it, including Utopianism, Social Democracy, Socialism, and Communism.

Guiding Questions:
- What are the implications of the stuff in people's lives?
- How are goods distributed globally?
- How does the student's sense of truth apply to materialism and consumerism?
- How does capitalism diminish or enhance their sense of truth?
- How do students want to relate to things and affect the world?

Materials Needed:
- Projector and computer to show digital story
- Ability to take field trips
Lesson Context:
This lesson is an exploration in materialism through Gandhian philosophy and is part of a larger unit on our relationship to the world including the social, spiritual and political arenas. The unit moves toward defining a "good life."

Teaching Activities:

Day One: Awareness
1) Breathing exercises: introduce long-deep breathing. Inhalation expands the belly and exhalation pushes the belly toward the spine.
2) Explain that students will explore and analyze awareness and materialism.
3) Read and Discuss the following poem by John Moffitt:

   To Look at Any Thing
   To look at any thing,
   If you would know that thing,
   You must look at it long:
   To look at this green and say,
   'I have seen spring in these Woods,' will not do -- you must
   Be the thing you see:
   You must be the dark snakes of
   Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
   You must enter in
   To the small silences between
   The leaves,
   You must take your time
   And touch the very peace
   They issue from.

Day Two: Awareness and Materialism (Three minute breathing meditation: follow the breath in and out with awareness of thoughts.)

1) Read aloud "Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948)" Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History (2005), volume 2, pp. 802-803, if the students have not already done so in a previous lesson.
2) Show introductory digital story on "stuff" then discuss awareness by revisiting the Moffitt poem in light of the digital story.
3) Ask students how they think they can become aware of the things they have.
4) Incorporate some of their ideas and offer counting their things as a starting point.
5) Students guess how much stuff is in the classroom and count items in different parts of the room and then add it up.
6) Students count the stuff in their backpacks.
7) Students describe in a journal how they perceive this project and where they think it is going. They discuss this in groups and present to the class.

Homework: Students take guesses and then count the stuff they have in their room at home.
Day Three: Awareness and Materialism (Begin class with silent meditation or yoga)
1) Students share with the class the number of things they have and discuss it in light of their guesses.
2) Pick one item in the classroom and discuss its origins. Have students identify factors such as: resources, labor, cost, waste, disposal prospects.
3) Students create charts to track a few of their own items and relevant factors. While students should think of a way to create their own charts, here is an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillow</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric and thread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zipper</td>
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5) Students take home charts to complete and conduct any necessary research.

Day Four: Materialism (Begin class with a silent meditation or yoga)
1) Students review and share their filled-in charts from home.
2) Students think about how they relate to things and pick a time period for which they will journal the use of things.
3) Students get in groups and decide on methodology and a time period for tracking the use of things.
4) Teacher tracks use of things for herself and shares with class, but students should create their own methodology for how they wish to track.

Homework: track the use of one thing for a week.

Day Five: Sustainability (Three minute counting meditation to start: count to ten in your mind. Repeat.)
Review homework: Share tracking of use of things and reflect on whether they need or love the object they chose to chart. What do they have that they do not use or love?
Teacher arranges a visit to a factory. Students create an interview of a factory worker then visit a factory to see how things are made.

Homework: Re-think their chart on resources, labor, etc., and make any necessary changes.

Day Six: Sustainability
Students share about impressions of their factory visit and if they had to make any changes to
Teacher arranges a visit to a recycling plant. Students create questions for the workers at the recycling plant and conduct interviews to understand where items go when they are recycled. Students share their impressions and write in their journals about the visit.

**Day Seven: Wealth Distribution**
Teacher presents the following information:

**Statistics in the World**
1.3 billion, or 22% of the world's population, live below the international poverty line, with a daily income of 1.5 dollars
841 million (14% of the world's population) are malnourished
880 million (15%) are without access to safe drinking water
1 billion (17%) are without adequate shelter
1.3 billion (22%) are without access to any kind of health care
2 billion (33%) are without electricity
2.6 billion (43%) are without access to sanitation
One quarter of all children between 5-14, 250 million are compelled to work, often in cruel conditions
Income in the top 1/5 of the world is as much as 220 times greater than the bottom 1/5

**Statistics in America**
Our cars outnumber licensed drivers
Nearly one third of the homes have 3 cars
Garages are becoming as big as homes
6 months is the average life of a cell phone in US
3 months in Japan

After sharing the statistics, write this quote on the board:
"There is enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed."  Gandhi

Ask students to get into groups of four to answer the following questions:
What are the relationships between these statistics?
How do they feel about the poverty?
How do they feel about the affluence?
Do they have any questions themselves?
How would they change things if they could?
Why do they think wealth is distributed this way?

Now have 20 bags of popcorn (for 12 students) and distribute it unevenly, according to income distribution discrepancies. In other words, 1/5 of the class will have approximately 220 times more than 1/5 of the class. Furthermore, the ones who have less will make the popcorn for the others (the laborers who receive less share). What do the students do? Have a discussion. Do they share? Should they share?

Share this quote by Gandhi, "We shall cease to think of getting what we can, but we shall
decline to receive what all cannot get." And reflect with students on the popcorn situation.

If they decided to share the popcorn, it was a satyagrahic act. They were able to listen to their conscience, act on it and sacrifice by empathizing with fellow classmates. Explain satyagraha.


While reviewing the photos, locate the places on the map, ask students to notice the differences and state them. Did they notice the differences in weekly food expenditures, packaging, amounts, whole versus processed foods, needs versus wants?

What are the implications of the differences in food consumption?

**Day Eight: Materialism**

Ask students to recall a memory of something or event that made them happy. Is it things or experiences with other people that matter most to them?

Then put this quote on the board, "Civilization in the real sense consists not in the multiplicity of wants, but in the deliberate reduction in wants. Inordinate wants obscure both basic needs and deeper human aspirations." - Gandhi

Tell the students it is their birthday and ask them to create criteria for gifts they will receive. They can consider: Do they like the gifts they get? Do they use them? What ultimately happens to the gifts? How do they show gratitude for gifts? Do they feel gratitude? Why do we give gifts? How would they ask for something they would use or want?

Students create a birthday invitation expressing their desires for gifts included in the invitation.

For homework, ask half the class to gather information about Melinda and Bill Gates' philanthropy ([www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)) and the other half to gather information about the Gates' wealth.

**Day Nine: Philanthropy**

Ask the students to present their information. First the philanthropy and then their wealth. Present the following quote by Ruskin:

Alas, it is not meat of which the refusal is the cruellest, or to which the claims is the validest. The life is more than the meat. The rich not only refuse food to the poor, they refuse wisdom, they refuse virtue, they refuse salvation.

How does the Gates' giving compare to their wealth?
Do they solve problems with their philanthropy?
Long-term or short-term?
What would long term solutions to remedy distribution look like?
What kinds of shifts in attitudes toward material would need to take place?
What kinds of shifts in attitudes toward humanity would need to take place?
How does the poem relate to the Gates' philanthropy?

Ask students to design, implement and share with the class their own philanthropic acts.

**Day Ten: Culmination**

Ask students to review their journals and reflect on what they have, where it came from, including labor, resources and disposal. Ask students what they derive from having things. Ask students to reflect on distribution of wealth and philanthropy. Ask students if they have decided to change any of their consumption habits.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**

Students demonstrate knowledge and reflection of ideas through class participation, field studies' interviews, journals, the popcorn experiment, the birthday invitations, their imovies, acts of philanthropy and shifts in their own consumption, views on materialism and ability to demonstrate compassion.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment:**

Show students how to use the iMovie maker and have them make their own digital story that conveys their thoughts and reflects on materialism.

**Bibliography:**


Prabhu, Joseph. "Gandhi, Empire, and a Culture of Peace" Philosophy Department, California State University, Los Angeles. vi


*See Also*


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