Title of Lesson: The Power of Nonviolence

Lesson By: Reha Modi

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 4th/English Language Arts

Class Size: 25-35

Time/Duration of Lesson: 3-5 Days
(Times for Teaching Activities will vary.)

Guiding Questions:
- How can we choose to be nonviolent like Gandhi and Dr. King?
- Did Dr. King and Gandhi choose to be nonviolent? Do we choose how we behave?
- How did Gandhi and King lead lives of nonviolence?

Lesson Abstract:
Students will read and reflect on how nonviolence had guided both Dr. King and Gandhi in their lives. They will use the information to draw comparisons between these two individuals and analyze how they both chose nonviolent paths of life. Students can then apply the idea of nonviolence as a choice in their own life, and formulate ways in which they can choose to be nonviolent in their everyday lives.

Lesson Content:

Both Dr. King and Mahatma Gandhi were revolutionaries of their time. Each lived in a time where inequalities existed and each fought to remove these inequalities. In order for students to understand what nonviolence is, it is important for them to learn where it stemmed from and how it has been used by great historical figures. Both Dr. King and Gandhi used nonviolence in the face of violence and were able to guide their communities to do the same. Their leadership mobilized others to “fight” nonviolently, and demonstrate peacefully.

When breaking apart the word “nonviolence,” the common prefix “non” is defined as “not.” Nonviolence is not simply the absence of violence, rather it is an active form of resisting violence. Nonviolent actions, are in fact actions. It can be best defined as peaceful behavior used to resist violent behavior. An example to use with fourth grade students: A bully is bothering you, and pushes you and steals your lunch. Think of nonviolent forms of resistance to use against the bully. Students should be able to provide examples where they are active in their resistance, Active, not violent. An example response would be having the student verbalize to the bully how the bully makes them feel. (“I don’t like it when…”)

Mohandas Gandhi grew up an ordinary boy. He was born in a small town in western India, the fourth and last child of his family. Gandhi was an average student in school and for the early part of his education was a shy boy. As he grew, he became increasingly aware of such feelings of fear and courage, and tested these emotions. Mohandas began to learn about and experiment with food and religion, and small transformations in his life were taking place. Until this time, Gandhi had led a humble life, blessed with a wife and one son.
Then two events altered his thinking and changed his life forever. The first occurred with a man that Gandhi knew as an acquaintance. Gandhi was asked by his brother to visit this man as a favor for him. Rather than welcome Gandhi, the man turned him away and the man’s messenger pushed Gandhi out. Gandhi had never been treated like this before and was angered by the man’s arrogance and snobbery. This first event is important to understand for a variety of reasons. The man that Gandhi was dealing with was British, so we see how colonialism affects the interaction between Gandhi and this British acquaintance. The second event occurs soon after Gandhi moves to South Africa. He had been hired to take a position as a barrister, and a lawsuit required him to travel a distance by train. Gandhi was ordered to ride in the baggage car, though he had a first class ticket in his possession. Gandhi protested, but the coachmen held firm on their position. So did Gandhi. Rather than acquiesce, Gandhi waited in the station waiting room, and that night he experienced first hand the power of discrimination. As written in his autobiography, “The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial – only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process.” (page 112) It was from that point forward that Gandhi developed his resistance against oppressive behavior.

Gandhi did make it to his destination, and stayed in South Africa for many years working to end discrimination towards Indians. He helped to create an organization called the Natal Indian Congress which helped educate others on the equalities that Indians faced in South Africa. Gandhi helped to mobilize the Indian people to reform themselves and their way of thinking. During his stay in South Africa, Gandhi was attacked physically and verbally, but Gandhi never fought back. He resolved to remain peaceful and used nonviolence as his weapon against others. He did not seek to cause harm, even to those who inflicted harm upon him. Gandhi did not even blame those who were violent towards him. Rather, he wanted to educate people to help eradicate discrimination and violence towards others.

After leaving South Africa, Gandhi returned to India, where he spent the rest of his life educating and inspiring the Indian community to use nonviolence as a means of “fighting back.” He did not believe that any type of violence was an answer to any problem, including resisting the British laws that were imposed. One such famous nonviolent protest was the “Salt March.” Gandhi organized thousands of people to march miles to the Indian Ocean where he picked up salt in protest to a law that denied Indians to use or purchase salt that was not taxed by the British government. Gandhi lived the remainder of his life choosing nonviolence in all aspects of life, until he was fatally shot in 1948.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia during the time of the Great Depression. He, as a young boy, would often wonder why people had to wait in “breadlines” and began to see the inequalities that existed among people. Like Gandhi, King had two incidents that shaped his development. The first one being the passing of his grandmother, whom he loved dearly. He had difficulty grappling with the idea of mortality. The second event involved a playmate of King’s. He had been friends with a white boy for three years, until one day he was not allowed to play with him as per request of the boy’s father. This incident ignited anger in King, and resulted in him developing hatred for the race of white people. As King grew older, he began to face more issues of segregation and racism. At the age of 19, he entered college and eventually became a minister, preaching sermons. King came from a religious family, which impacted the
course of life that he followed in several ways. First, his religious background affected the career choice he made. Second, growing up in the church fostered his ability to get along with all different people from different backgrounds.

A pivotal moment in King’s life was the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her bus seat for a white person. Following her refusal, she was arrested and E.D. Nixon called upon Dr. King to speak to the black community in Montgomery, Alabama, and lead a bus boycott. The success in this boycott was tremendous, and King as well as the community saw how powerful their demonstration was. The event was a catalyst for many more boycotts and protests to come. All of these demonstrations were rooted in nonviolence, and the community saw the strength they had as a group working together peacefully, to stand up for their civil liberties.

Following the bus boycott in Montgomery, King spent the next twelve years leading nonviolent demonstrations to protest other forms of discrimination that existed. Examples include the sit ins at lunch counters where blacks would sit and be refused service. Rather than leave, the blacks would remain seated until they were abused, arrested or both. Even in the face of violence, King remained nonviolent in his actions and speech. He, like Gandhi, did not believe that violence was the tool to solve the problems of racism and discrimination. Education and empowering the community spoke volumes to the oppressors, and over time King led many people in fighting many of the injustices that the black community faced.

Both Gandhi and King used their personal strengths to inspire and lead their communities to overcome oppression. They both employed the use of nonviolence and served as leaders of social movements. This weapon of nonviolence proved to be much stronger than actual weapons. Both King and Gandhi guided their communities to learn how to have faith in their ability to create change and reform if they remained strong in their nonviolent plight.

**California State Content Standards:**
RC 2.5: Compare and contrast information on the same topic after reading several passages or articles.
LS 1.7: Emphasize points in a way that help the listener or viewer to follow important ideas and concepts.

**Materials Needed:**
- Paper
- Pencils/Pens
- Markers
- Age appropriate magazines
- Poster board

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**
- Character map
- T chart – compare and contrast Dr. King and Gandhi
- Poetry using the 5 senses: Subject: nonviolence (see below)
- Create a poster using words and images depicting nonviolence
- Narrative Prompt regarding nonviolence. (see below)

**Bibliography:**
Clayborne, Carson. The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Grand Central
Narrative Prompt:

There have been several heroes in our history that have used nonviolence to resolve conflicts or solve problems in their lives. You don’t have to be a hero to be nonviolent. Anyone can be nonviolent in their everyday actions. Imagine this situation: Your best friend came to school one day and told everyone a terrible lie about you. You are upset but you have just learned about Gandhi and Dr. King and want to solve this problem in a nonviolent way. Write a story about how you and your friend solve your conflict in a nonviolent way.

Senses Poem

Nonviolence

Nonviolence smells like ______________________________

Nonviolence tastes like _______________________________

Nonviolence sounds like _____________________________

Nonviolence feels like ______________________________

Nonviolence looks like ______________________________

Below the student can illustrate their poem using the information from their poem.