# The Circle of Life: Gandhi’s Ideas on Oneness With Others

**Lesson By:** Jane C. Moore

| Grade Level/Subject Areas: 7th grade social studies | Class Size: 25-30 | Time/Duration of Lesson: 2-60 minute periods, but it can be manipulated as needed. |

**Guiding Questions:**
- What is Gandhi’s idea of harmony?
- How did the idea of harmony help him achieve his goals?

**Lesson Abstract:**
Gandhi felt all people and things are interconnected. He believed in a unifying circle of humanity. Gandhi used this connection with all people to help end violence. Gandhi approached conflicts from a win-win point of view, valuing the other person’s ideas and perspectives. He honored all individuals, of all religious faiths, whether wealthy or poor. These things helped Gandhi win the affection of the British and the rest of the world and made India free.

**Lesson Content:**
Gandhi believed in harmony with all people and things. He created interconnectedness and harmony with others by showing empathy, kindness, building relationships, and valuing people of all faiths and cultures. He used these principles to his advantage to promote nonviolence. Gandhi said “I have been convinced more than ever that human nature is much the same, no matter under what clime it flourishes, and that if you approached people with trust and affection, you would have ten-fold trust and thousand-fold affection returned to you.” (Fischer, 1982, p. 107). He saw the goodness in others, realizing that we are all interrelated. This idea of harmony with others helped Gandhi achieve independence for India.

Gandhi felt he was equal to others - no less than, or no more than. He believed in a unifying circle of humanity. During his lifetime, the caste system was strictly enforced. Untouchables were considered by almost all Indians to be less than human. Gandhi welcomed untouchables in his home. He lived among them and even fasted on their behalf. One of Gandhi’s guiding principles was “no reform is possible unless some of the educated and the rich voluntarily accept the status of the poor, travel third, refuse to enjoy amenities denied to the poor and, instead of taking avoidable hardships, discourtesies and injustice as a matter of course, fight for their removal.” (Gandhi, 1957, p. 379). This unity with the untouchables demonstrates how he practiced what he preached. He also fasted for positive relations between the Hindus and the Muslims. At the end of the fast, he used hymns from three faiths to promote unity. In fact he referenced many different religions in his writings: Muslim, Christian, Buddhism and Hinduism. He was able to synthesize literature from both Eastern and Western philosophers. He believed there was “harmony in diversity, love despite differences” (Fischer, 1982, p. 16) and in doing so brought together people everywhere.

Gandhi believed in oneness with others and in harmony, but this was not to the detriment of the self. He felt one had to be right with oneself first and then fit into the larger circle of humanity.
He believed when he improved his life, that it would help to improve others. Gandhi practiced self discipline and restraint by restricting his diet, praying and meditating. He felt these inner reforms and transformations would then change society because of the interconnectedness of all. Waltz and Ritchie said about Gandhi “Gandhi preferred that we think of the world in holistic terms, with no center or boundaries. All life is equal and to be respected: no part is greater than the whole.” (Waltz and Ritchie, p. 216).

Even though Gandhi disliked the British treatment of Indians in South Africa and in India, he still supported Britain and the British people, choosing to focus on the interrelatedness of everyone. In fact he volunteered to nurse the British soldiers in the Boer War and in World War 1. Gandhi fervently supported the British in World War 2, choosing to objectively understand that the British were fighting defensively. He supported the British people on a personal level as well. While in London during the Round Table Talks, Gandhi had two British guards assigned to him. He became friends with them and involved them in his life. He liked them so much that he gave them a watch when he returned to India. In all of his campaigns against the British, he wrote the British government and told them exactly what he was going to do, giving them time to change their policies and save face. In Champaran, where he had organized protests against the British he said “A sort of friendliness sprang up between the officials and myself. They thus saw that I did not want to offend them personally, but that I wanted to offer civil resistance to their orders.”(Gandhi, 1957, p. 411). His continual demonstration of love and forgiveness helped win the British over and eventually made India independent.

When Gandhi was put in jail by the British in South Africa, the General in charge, General Smuts was rude and disrespectful to him and the other Indians. Smuts reneged on his promise to repeal a racist law that required Indians to register with the government using fingerprints. Indians were also taxed unfairly over this issue. While in jail, Gandhi made General Smuts some sandals. Gandhi focused on the interconnectedness of people. Fischer said “Smuts helped to make Gandhi by not destroying him. Gandhi increased the stature of Smuts. “(Fischer, 1982, p.49). As a result of this positive relationship, some of the restrictive policies against the Indians diminished. The Smuts-Gandhi Settlement of 1914 abolished the tax on Indians. Not only did Gandhi’s relationship with Smuts help win freedom from the British, this working relationship demonstrated to others a positive way of working with people, even enemies.

While Gandhi realized the interrelatedness of all humans and the goodness in others, it did not mean his life was without conflict. On the contrary, Gandhi had many conflicts in his life, even creating some. He was able to see problems as opportunities because he focused on the connection between and among all humans, concentrating on the principles of truth and the ultimate goal of the situation. He and his top advisor, Nehru did not always agree on the specifics of the movement, but he always respected him and showed him love. Nehru believed more in Western traditions and modern civilization with its focus on businesses and technology not the spiritual, self sufficient lifestyle that Gandhi envisioned. Gandhi said in a letter to Nehru “It is necessary that we understand each other well… It would not matter if ultimately we might have to agree to differ so long as we remained one at heart as we are today.” (Parel, 1997, p. 155). He promoted harmony in all of his relationships.
Gandhi approached conflicts with a win-win attitude, always trying to work with people. He said “we who seek justice will have to do justice for others,” a twist on the Parable on the Mount (Parel, 1997 p., 17). He focused on love and loving others. All of these attributes helped him with his nonviolent campaigns against the British and ultimately won India its freedom. Gandhi realized that all humans are connected. He used that to his advantage. In studying Gandhi, one must focus on how Gandhi developed relationships with all different types of people – the enemy, different faiths and social classes. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Gandhi would be pleased that King incorporated this idea of oneness with others. In his letter from a Birmingham jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”(Carson, 1998,p.189).

**State Content Standards:**
Georgia SS7RC1 Students will enhance reading in all curriculum areas by establishing context.SS7RC1 D. Students will explore life experiences related to subject area content

**Materials Needed:**
- Digital Story “Gandhi’s Circle of Life”
- “Lesson Content” from above if needed
- James Taylor’s Song “Shed a Little Light”

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**
1. Oneness circle. Have 8-10 volunteers come up to the front of the room. Ask them to stand in a circle, having each student stand behind another. On the count of 3 have each student sit on the person’s lap behind them. What should happen is all the students will be sitting on the person’s lap behind them and they all will be supporting each other in a circle. Discuss how each person is their own person, yet each person needs everyone to form a larger circle. Discuss what happens if one person falls. Have students define what oneness with others means – think pair share, discuss as a class.
2. View “Gandhi’s Circle of Life” digital story. How did Gandhi use these practices, and in what capacity?
3. In pairs, have students read “lesson content” above. Ask what some specific instances are when Gandhi used this idea of oneness with humanity to help him promote social change. Or if that is too much reading, tell students some specific instances of how Gandhi practiced this idea of oneness.
4. Have students read this quote by King and discuss how it relates to oneness and Gandhi:”I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in and inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”
5. If time, have students listen to the words from James Taylor’s “Shed a Little Light” and discuss.
6. Extra: Show a picture of Norman Rockwell’s the Golden and Rule and discuss.
   Culminating activity – Have students write an essay on examples of how they’ve connected with other and how it changed their lives.
Bibliography:


