Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson: Take A Walk in Their Shoes: Great Leaders of Our Time

Lesson By: Laura Mullen

Grade Level/Subject Areas:
Early Elementary School (Grades 2-5)/Social Studies

Class Size:
Can be done for any class size.

Time/Duration of Lesson:
90 Minutes (can be referred back to and extended for several days)

Guiding Questions:
• What are the characteristics of a good leader?
• How can good leaders make positive changes, for not only the people around them, but for others in the world?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson looks at the characteristics of a successful leader by using examples of leaders who used nonviolence to change society. Students will discuss these characteristics and look in their own community to find people who exhibit these characteristics. By identifying community members they will better be able to see the important role effective leadership plays in our society.

Lesson Content:
What makes a good leader? People ask themselves that question everyday. The great leaders of our time have brought different qualities and ideas that have shaped, and continue to shape our world. Some of these leaders include, but are not limited to, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Ruby Bridges, and Mattie Stepanek. Each of these leaders has positively affected millions around the world by their peaceful actions. Using nonviolence to change the world inspires others to do the same. Without these leaders our world would be a much different place.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was the first person to think about a worldview of nonviolence. The strategy he developed was a moral force that he called “satyagraha” which is an active pursuit of truth through nonviolence. He believed that nonviolence and truth must go together. The values attached to this active pursuit of truth included: courage, compassion, truth, trust, fearlessness, forgiveness, service/selflessness, and self-restraint. Gandhi first used “satyagraha” in South Africa to address racial discrimination. He continued to use “satyagraha” to change the economic, political, and social problems for British colonial India. Gandhi used a variety of methods to realize change. Included in those methods were fasting, hartal (strike), noncooperation, boycotts, marches, and civil disobedience. According to Gandhi there are four (4) objects of life. They are wealth and
power, pleasure, ethics, and the need for spiritual striving (transcendence). These objects should not be operated in isolation from one another. There should be harmony between all the objects. Gandhi’s life was his message. Many of these people followed Gandhi’s lead to change the world for the better in a nonviolent way. (Lecture by D. Tara Sethia at Cal. Poly. Pomona, July 14, 2009)

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was someone who followed Gandhi in word and deed. Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up in Atlanta Georgia in a loving and caring home. His father was a minister and religion was an integral part of his life. At the age of six (6) Martin had an incident that had a great affect on his life. Martin had a white playmate who he would play games with everyday. When they entered school they were separated. Martin was not allowed to go to the “white school”. The friendship became more and more distant until finally his friend’s father would no longer let his son play with Martin because of the color of his skin. Up until this time he had not experienced this kind of hate. At first Martin felt hate towards the white people but remembered that his parents always said that it was his duty to love everyone. As a student at Crozer Seminary he heard a sermon about Gandhi and became fascinated with his nonviolence resistance. The more he read about Gandhi the more he regained his commitment to the power of love. Using satyagraha (truth through nonviolence), which he learned from his extensive research of Gandhi, Martin developed his own philosophy of nonviolence resistance. This nonviolence resistance philosophy was effective during the civil rights campaigns. Some of those campaigns included the freedom rides, the drive for voting rights, the lunch counter sit-ins, and the Montgomery Alabama bus boycott.

Cesar Chavez was born in 1927 to a family of migrant farm workers. After serving in World War II Cesar married and eventually had eight (8) children. It was during this time that social activism became an integral part of his life. He and his wife started teaching Mexican immigrants to read and organized voting registration drives for new U.S. citizens. Cesar was greatly influenced by the peaceful philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi. In 1962 Cesar Chavez, along with others, started a union, called the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). The NFWA organized strikes to obtain better working conditions for the farm workers. There were bitter and violent fights between the grape growers and the workers. Chavez was jailed in the struggle. In order to get growers to improve farm worker conditions, Chavez organized a nation-wide lettuce boycott. In 1968, Chavez organized a five-year “grape boycott”. This was a movement that urged people to stop buying California grapes until farm workers had better pay and working conditions. Cesar Chavez’s motto was “Si, se puede” (translated means “Yes, it can be done”) and he proved it true. His work changed the lives of millions of people for the better.

Not all great leaders are adults. Ruby Bridges was a small child that made the country a better place just by one small, courageous action. Ruby Bridges was born in Mississippi in 1954. Ruby and her family moved to New Orleans when she was only two (2) years old. In 1960, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) contacted Ruby’s parents to see if Ruby could participate in the integration of New Orleans schools. Ruby’s parents agreed to help and this decision changed their lives
forever. On November 14, 1960, at the age of six (6), Ruby became the first African-American child to desegregate an elementary school. On that day, federal marshals escorted Ruby into William Frantz Public School. Her brave march into school gained national attention. Angry protestors yelled at Ruby and white parents pulled their children from school. Despite everything Ruby went to school every day. Ruby is now married and living in New Orleans. Ruby started the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which is an organization to promote and encourage the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of difference through education. The foundation believes that prejudice and racism can be eliminated.

Mattie Stepanek was no ordinary leader. He was born in 1990 with muscular dystrophy, a disease that affected not only him but caused the death of his three (3) older siblings. Mattie, although confined to a wheelchair and using many machines to help him breathe, became a national and international spokesperson for peace and global tolerance. He spoke to school children, business leaders, and anyone else who would listen. Mattie was an accomplished poet who started writing poetry at the age of three (3). His poems spoke of love, peace, tolerance, and courage. He published five (5) books of poetry called Heartsongs. All five (5) books were on the New York Times bestseller list. Unfortunately, as with many great leaders, Mattie died too soon. He died in 2004 at the age of thirteen (13) but his poetry is still inspiring others. One of the things that mattered most to Mattie was "praying and playing, and celebrating life every day in some way.” All great leaders have a philosophy and motto that they live by and Mattie was no different. His philosophy was “Remember to play after every storm” and his motto was “Think gently, speak gently, live gently.”(www.mattieonline.com, July 20,2009)

All of these leaders were successful because they lead by example. Gandhi believed that leaders should be lifelong learners and he never made the same mistake twice. All of the leaders mentioned understood what brought people together and what pulls them apart. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.” (www.brainyquote.com, July 21, 2009)

**State Content Standards:**

*Massachusetts State Content Frameworks: Strand 1 Concepts and Skills*

**Standard:** Civics and Government

46HSS: Give examples of fictional characters or real people in the school or community who were good leaders and good citizens, and explain the qualities that made them admirable (e.g., honesty, dependability, modesty, trustworthiness, courage).

**Materials Needed:**
- Digital story *Take A Walk in Their Shoes: Great Leaders of Our Time*
- Newspapers and Magazines
- Paper and Colored Pencils/Crayons/Markers
**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

1. View digital story: *Take a Walk in Their Shoes: Great Leaders of Our Time*. Discuss the leaders depicted in the digital story and what common characteristics they all shared. How did they use nonviolence to foster positive change in their communities? What made the people in their communities respect them?
2. Using the characteristics discussed in the first activity, students will use magazines and newspapers to find words and pictures that depict a successful leader. These items will be used to begin the creation of a community bulletin board.
3. Ask students to think about the people in their community that they identified from activity one (1) and have them create a poster depicting that person. Students will draw a picture and write a description of that person.

**Bibliography:**


