Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title: Growing Hands: Creating and Maintaining A Sustainable, Delightful Learning Place

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Grade Level: Initial Presentation, Grades 4-6 (Student Council Members). Activities: Grades K-6, all staff members.

Lesson Length: Initial Presentation to students: 1-2 hours over a period of 2 days. Activities: Rock Garden 1 mo. Happiness boards over the year. Positive speech: School year.

Relevant (K) Common Core Standards:
Several standards are listed as the activity will involve 3 grades and eventually the entire school.

Reading Standards for Informational Text
Gr. 4, 5, 6 KID 1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
Gr. 4, 5, 6 CS 5. Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
Gr. 5 IK&I 8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills
Gr. 4, 5, 6 F.. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Writing Standards
Gr. 4, 5, 6 TTP 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
Gr. 4, 5 PDR 4. Produce clear and coherent writing (including multiple-paragraph texts) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Gr. 4, 5 RBPK 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
Gr. 6 RBPK 7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources

Speaking and Listening
Gr. 6 C&C 1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Gr. 6 PKI 4. Present claims and findings (e.g., argument, narrative, informative, response to literature presentations), sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details and nonverbal elements to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation. CA

KID: Key Ideas and Details
CS: Craft and Structure
IK&I: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
F: Fluency
TTP: Text Type and Purpose
PDR: Production and Distribution of Writing
RBPK: Research to Build and Present Knowledge
C&C: Comprehension and Collaboration
Lesson Abstract: Through the creation of spaces and places around the school, students and staff will create a sustainable, delightful place of learning.

Guiding Questions:
1. What is a sustainable, delightful place of learning?
2. What are the individual and collective responsibilities in maintaining such a community?
3. How is Gandhi connected to sustainable happiness?

Lesson Background:
Growing Hands: Creating and Maintaining A Sustainable, Delightful Place of Learning is a broad title encompassing community building and sustaining a positive school climate for learning. How can that be accomplished, and continued over the years? Does it have to look the same in all communities to be truly sustainable?

Sustainable happiness is defined, “as happiness that contributes to individual community and/or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations.” (O’Brien, p. 10)

A delightful place of learning fits under the umbrella of the JCSH (Joint Consortium for School Health, Canada) definition of Positive Mental Health: “the capacity of each of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.” (p. 8 Morrison & Peterson 2011). It is essential we look “beyond the problems in the school community, and recognize that both schools and students already have strengths and gifts that can be built upon and nurtured.” (p. 5 Morrison & Peterson)

Our atmosphere of testing and defining a person’s worth by a score rips at the very heart. Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1947) wanted to build and sustain in his native India, and the rest of the world. For Gandhi, individual happiness and freedom (swaraj) were only attained and sustained through caring enough for yourself to care for others more. It was not about wants, but about compassion, and justice. Of learning to view life from the inside out, with heart transformation to know what is right and just. (Sethia, 2012, Shadyac, 2011). Viewing the school community through a positive lens helps students to see they are the solution, and have solutions.

Schools are an influential part in all students’ lives. Just as Gandhi wanted all people recognized for who they were and not simply for what they did (Sethia, 2012; Parel 2009), the role of school has been regarded both nationally and internationally as an important environment for promoting the psychological wellness and resilience of children and youth. Schools provide a ‘critical context for shaping children’s self-esteem, self-efficacy and a sense of control over their lives.’ (Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle and Hardle, 2004).

Schools are to be a safe, healthy space for students to grow and develop lives of compassion and caring for themselves, the community, and world. Gandhi witnessed first hand the atrocities of indentured farmers both in South Africa and India, and violence begetting violence every time the farmers tried to regain any rights from the British, either through new policies or actual physical violence. He knew the only way India could be rebuilt as an independent country was through national and individual swaraj (freedom, self-rule). He also knew the freedom and self-
rule would only be internalized if ahimsa (non-violence) were a part of the equation. The violence had to end, and the only way for that to stop was through cooperation and compromise. (Sethia, 2012, Parel, 2009). He desired for the farmers to regain their work for the sake of the individual, and nation as a whole. He knew if the farmers were not allowed the freedom to create and farm for the people once again, and not limited by British greed, India would never be a free nation. We see and hear of violence growing in our schools. Questions needing to be asked again and again are: Do students own any part of their educational experience? Are students encouraged to be critical thinkers, to own the process of thought, or is the institution of learning more concerned about quantity of learning versus quality? Gandhi knew the power of change was within each individual, and had to start with each individual. (Sethia, 2012, Parel, 2009) Are students challenged to care, and think about issues beyond their immediate surroundings? Gandhi knew the farmers in India were hurting, and needed to regain their independence for the sake of India, not simply the farmer. (Sethia, 2012, Parel, 2009) Delightful, sustainable places of learning are school environments where students and staff members connect every day, where school grounds are safe, and policies implemented “promote health and wellbeing, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment.” (p. 21 Morrion & Peterson, 2011) Students need the freedom from within, for self-learning to benefit the world around them, and to care beyond self-needs. Gandhi intuitively knew of the connectedness between all species, and desired ahimsa, (nonviolence), for all on the planet. He also knew ahimsa had to be a change in lifestyle and thought by the people as a collective group, and from within each individual. (Sethia, 2012, Parel, 2009)

Gandhi, in a 1946 interview, stated he believed India’s independence must begin with the individual villages being self-sustaining, and self-ruled. There was to be no pyramid, or hierarchy, as all villages were interrelated to each other. (Parel, 2009) Through decades of working with people, Gandhi saw first hand the destruction of many working for the few, and of policies and laws many benefitted from, but were actually directed at the few. For the people of India to experience swaraj (freedom), and know it was for the benefit of all, Gandhi knew the people needed an awareness of the issues, and self-awareness from within. (Sethia, 2012)

“Children and youth have inner strengths and gifts that support their capacity to initiate, direct, and sustain positive life directions.” (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Losier and Morrison, 2007) Research is showing students have the ability to be self-sustaining, take care of themselves as individuals, and are aware of the world around them (O’Brien, 2013). Maintaining and sustaining such a learning environment comes through individual belief in self and others, and in the practice ahimsa through positive words and actions.

Bibliography:

Teaching Activities:
Groundwork for the projects will be given to the Student Council Members at the beginning of the year.

ROCK GARDENS
After the last school building improvement, the school site was left with no vegetation between two wings of the school, with trees in the second section, and spotty grass in the third area. The playground is mostly asphalt and sand, with wood chips thrown in around the playground equipment to keep children safe.

Being located in the Mojave Desert means water usage is a major concern of the school district. School staff was informed no grass would be replaced between the two wings, and watering of the main grassy area continues to be sporadic. In the second section, tree roots are above ground, and with the sand spread throughout, the area is not a friendly place for students. An area on the main playground is simply dirt surrounded by trees the district maintenance workers try to save every year. So far they have been successful.

“To forget about how to dig the earth and to tend to the soil is to forget about ourselves.”
Mohandas K. Gandhi (Lewis)
“Show me your garden and I shall tell you who you are.” Alfred Austin (Lewis) (Italics and word change added)

Teacher Responsibility:
1. Find an individual or computer program that can draw up designs/plans for presentation.
2. Give students the initial ideas, and let them run with the designs, creating learning space on campus.
3. Be the liaison with staff, PTO and district personnel for the initial vision explanation.
4. Working with the student council, seek donations of supplies and materials from the community.
5. Communicate final design and installation schedule with staff.

Student Work:
1. Research sustainable resources to use in the designs of the gardens.
2. Create the design for the gardens. Only stipulations are the words love, compassion, and hope need to be visible in one garden, and self, others, and community in the other. The area between the trees will be student design with no stipulations. All spaces need to be more than rocks: the design needs rock patterns, colors, numbers, shapes, etc. so the creation is an outdoor teaching tool for the school community to enjoy. The spaces need to be walking, experiential spaces once completed.
3. Present designs and plans to staff, PTO and potential donors.
4. Write letters requesting additional funding for the project from individuals/groups not in the community.
5. Create a timeline for completion of the project: By December of 2013? January of 2014?
6. Be the liaison with peers to explain the project, and individual responsibility.
7. Assist with the layout of materials once designs are approved and ready for installation.
8. Report completion to donors and write thank-you letters for support given.

GO GREEN
1. Student Council will purchase one green plant for each room on campus. (This could grow to more as the year progresses).
2. Students will draw names from a hat for responsibility, care and upkeep of said plant in each room.
3. Students will work with staff members to decide the best time for watering and care.

**SIT A SPELL**
1. Student Council will work with district personnel to design and install benches around the campus.
2. All will know the purpose of the benches by design or color. Some will be talking benches, for students to safely converse with each other during recesses and lunch, and some will be listening benches for students to sit and reflect on their day (hopefully the positive interactions during the day, and not a bench for discipline issues [i.e. “the blue bench” many have sat on within the district])

**LUNCHTIME WELLNESS**
1. Students will research the best way to have safety and wellness in the cafeteria during lunch. This could include, but not be limited to surveys of peers, staff and parents, field trips to see how other schools handle lunchtime, or online research.
2. Students will present solutions to peers, staff, and parents.

**HAPPINESS WALLS**
1. Students will research the best materials to install on textured outside walls for permanent bulletin boards to be hung. Create them in the same color of the walls so they don’t stand out. Use materials able to withstand the weather so they don’t become eyesores.
2. Students will work with district personnel/adults to install bulletin boards on wall.
3. Students will design a calendar for monthly topics to be written on the bulletin boards: “Count on Me” math wall for numbers and positive words for helping one another; “I Am” wall for positive words about self; “You Are” wall for positive words about others, etc.
4. Students will maintain bulletin boards.

These are some suggestions that could be used at any school, depending on climate, and site specifications. Each is adaptable and easy to build upon for ideas at other sites.

**Materials:**
1. Design planning software or individual who could draw the plans.
2. Sustainable materials students, staff and district personnel approve for creations.
3. Created timeline for installations. CRITICAL for success of activities.
4. Green plants.