Title of Lesson: The Power of Nonviolent Struggle

Lesson By: Patrick O’Connell

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: High School – world studies

Class Size: 25-34

Time/ Duration of Lesson: 90 minutes or two 50 minute classes

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:

- Students will understand the difference between two views of political power.
- Students will challenge their own misconceptions about the power of nonviolence (or lack there of)
- Students will write a 3-6 paragraph essay on how Gandhi was just the start of the development of the nonviolent means of struggle and other lessons from the documentary

Lesson Abstract:
Students will begin thinking about how nonviolence could be powerful. By using excerpts from the movie Gandhi and the documentary A Force More Powerful, students will see one example of how nonviolence was used to liberate a country.

Lesson Content:
The purpose of this lesson is to walk students through a gradual process of understanding that something as weak-sounding as nonviolence can actually be powerful. The main content of the lesson will be the Gandhi movie and a documentary A Force More Powerful. I chose to just use two excerpts from the Gandhi movie raise specific reactions. It shows that nonviolence has been used to defeat the most powerful empire the world have ever known up to that point in history.

Inquiry
The first part of this lesson is called an inquiry. It is meant to wake students up and get them thinking about the power of nonviolence. They will watch and reflect on two powerful scenes from the Gandhi movie. After students have reflected on these scenes and you have discussed them as a class, you next watch a documentary about the Salt March (the first section of the series, A Force More Powerful). I have included a worksheet for the Inquiry in Appendix A.

In the Inquiry part of the lesson, you will first watch a clip where Gandhi and other Indian independence leaders are negotiating with the British authorities, after the massacre at Amritsar. (right after the intermission (1:34:40) – (1:37:50) “no intention of making a martyr of him”.)

The ambassador says “You don’t think we are just going to walk out of India?”

Gandhi replies: “Yes, in the end you will walk out because 100,000 English men simply can not control 350,000,000 Indians if they refuse to cooperate. And that is what we intend to achieve: peaceful, nonviolent non-cooperation, until you yourselves see the wisdom of leaving.”

I think this is one of the more confrontational moments in the film. The reason I like it is that it both makes sense when you actually think about what Gandhi is saying, but also does not make

Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan
sense when you consider how we are told political change really comes about. When you really think about it, it almost seems ridiculous that 100,000 English men could control 350,000,000 Indians. Hopefully, this will start to raise questions of how the English could do it. This is the case in all colonial situations. How/why do colonized peoples allow themselves to be colonized? The second part of this quote focuses on the nonviolent means Gandhi plans to use to get the British to decide to leave. This should raise doubts. Our textbooks are full of wars and violent revolutions. So is the news we read, watch or listen to. It is a pretty safe assumption that our students will believe that violence is the way political change is brought about. Why would anyone choose to use nonviolence when they have such overwhelming numbers? Why not use guns like our “founding fathers”? 

The next clip is the satyagahi (activist trained for nonviolent action) raid on the Darhamsala salt mine (scene 19 Dharasana Salt Works (2:14) – (2:19) when reporter, Martin Sheen, is calling in his story). This is a bit more shocking than the earlier negotiation clip. The satyagrahis are lined up to try to get into a main center where salt is made. The mostly-Indian guards are lined up to protect the mine. Gandhi has chosen this tactic as an escalation of the strategy of non-cooperation, where thousands or millions of Indians have chosen to break the British monopoly on salt by publicly making their own. The jails have been filled and the British have not backed down. Rather than just making and selling salt illegally, the satyagrahis are going to raid the British salt mine and take the salt. (The documentary later in the lesson gives a more in-depth description of the background of what happened.) After seeing dozens of satyagahis walk boldly up to the guards and get beaten back with steal-tipped bamboo poles, a reporter announces to his paper that the British have lost all moral authority they have to rule India.

I like this clip because it raises the issue of how remaining courageously nonviolent in the face of extreme violence undermines the power of those using violence. This is how the dynamics of nonviolence work. Professor Gene Sharp has written extensively on this in his very detailed study *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*. In essence, nonviolent action works when those using it are able to face escalating violence while remaining nonviolent and continuing their action. They show that violence, the main means the government uses for maintaining its power, is no longer effective in maintaining the submission of its subjects. Another factor is that those carrying out the violence no longer have the excuse of returning the violence of those they are controlling. When they no longer have the excuse of using violence against those who are being violent with them, they are forced to actually think about why they are doing what they are doing – they no longer have the excuse of defending themselves to hide behind. This causes those who carry out the violence to start questioning why they are doing what they are doing. The naked violence also causes the general public to also choose if they support both the violence and the system behind it. Dr. King called this “creative tension.” Issues that the general public are able to ignore are not so easily ignored anymore. The courage of the nonviolent resisters in the face of oppression gives courage to those who may have not liked the policy, but had remained silent. Over time, the system of power begins to crumble.

**The Salt Campaign**

The second part of the lesson (probably the next class period) is watching and discussing one chapter in the documentary series *A Force More Powerful*, which goes into detail about the Salt March and campaign, with live footage from the raid on the Dharasana Salt Works. This ties in
quite well with the clips from the *Gandhi* movie. **I love using this documentary because it is one thing to read about Gandhi and a whole other thing to actually see him. It's powerful!** And it is also pretty heavy to see the actual raid on Darhamsana. The documentary also provides a pretty useful summary of the struggle and how it they eventually achieved victory. This is also the key campaign that lead to the British agreeing to “just walk out of India.” I have included a note-taking worksheet with fill-in-the-blanks for students to fill in in Appendix B, along with answers.

A good source to gain background knowledge about the Salt Campaign is Gandhi’s own writings. One of Gandhi’s key organizing tools in both South Africa and India was his newspapers. Gandhi’s own writings are great primary source documents you can bring into this lesson on Gandhi and how he organized the nonviolent Indian struggle for independence. The book *Satyagraha* (soul force or Gandhi’s term for nonviolent resistance) is a great source for his writings on the Salt Campaign (as well as his writings on other campaigns and nonviolent resistance in general). Here you will find articles explaining the campaign to the Indian people and the letters he wrote to Lord Irwin (the British Viceroy) announcing his intentions for the campaign and the escalation to the raid on the Salt Works. One interesting thing you could do to extend this lesson is to copy his letters to Lord Irwin and have students read them. They can learn a great deal about how Gandhi viewed the struggle he was engaged in and how he communicated with his “enemy.” Another suggestion is to have students read Gandhi’s own account of how the campaign was going from his stories in *Young India*. You can compare Gandhi’s accounts with how the documentary explained the Salt Campaign.

**California State Content Standards:**
10.4 Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.
4. Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.

**Guiding Questions:**
- How can nonviolence be as powerful as violence?
- Why would Gandhi and the Indian people choose to use nonviolence when they were facing people who would use violence against them?
- Is nonviolence as relevant today as it was in Gandhi’s time?

**Materials Needed:**
- video/DVD of video *A Force More Powerful* video series and the movie *Gandhi*
- VCR/DVD player and TV or projector
- Inquiry handout with questions (appendix A)
- “Defying the Crown” video note sheet (appendix B)

**Lesson Context:**
I envision this to be a lesson at the start of a unit on decolonization struggles. If you are short of time, you could do this lesson and move on to the next unit you need to cover. You can get a flavor for both how one nation chose to free itself from colonization and educate your students
about nonviolent struggle at the same time. You can extend the lesson to look more in-depth into Indian history or at least the British colonization of India. Another possibility is to use it in comparison to another anti-colonial struggle that used armed struggle (perhaps Ireland). A last extension possibility is to use this lesson as a launching point for a study of nonviolent struggle.

**Teaching Activities:**

1. Have students consider which they think is a more powerful way to achieve political change: armed struggle or nonviolent struggle? Have them do a quick-write and have a brief discussion of their answers.
2. Do inquiry lesson (see handout #1) and have students answer questions after each clip from the *Gandhi* movie. Discuss their answers to the questions.
3. Watch “Defying the British Crown” segment from *A Force More Powerful* video series. Have students fill-in the notes hand-out, stopping every now and then and then to have students fill in the blanks and discuss the answers.
4. Show *Two Views of Power* digital story. Ask them to write down their responses to the video. Discuss their reactions. Which perspective do they think makes the most sense (power comes from the barrel of a gun or from the cooperation of the people)? Why?
5. Have them consider if they may have changed how they view nonviolent action, after watching the Gandhi video and the Two Views of Power digital story.
6. For extra credit, they can follow the news (either TV, newspapers or radio) and be aware and then write down when they hear about nonviolent action and tell it to the class.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**

1. Classroom discussions
2. Inquiry worksheet
3. Defying the Crown worksheet and essay

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**

If you have more time, you can make a study of anti-colonial movements. You can compare India with South Africa and Ireland. They were all initially colonized by the British and they provide the broadest comparison for the different means of struggle. India was on the extreme of nonviolence, South Africa was a mixture of nonviolence and armed struggle, and Ireland was straight armed-struggle. Ireland was/is England’s longest held colony (they still claim the 6 counties in the north) and was the shortest guerilla war (from the Easter Uprising in 1914 to the signing of the treaty dividing Ireland 1922), though they had been resisting the Brits for over 600 years. Apartheid was introduced in South Africa in 1948 and Mandela was sworn into office 1994. Gandhi launched the campaign to free India from British rule in 1929 and they achieved independence in 1947. It may seem easier to say the Irish struggle was shortest, so armed struggle must work better. But that would be a mistake. After they achieved independence, they had a bloody civil-war which killed more Irish men than the eight-year struggle for independence. This was followed by a prolonged very violent struggle for control of Northern Ireland, which is hopefully coming to resolution as I write this lesson (7/27/07). South Africa made a mostly peaceful transition to democracy, but have yet to really accomplish a just economic system. India was divided into India and Pakistan and Muslim-Hindu tensions created by the colonial system still persist to this day.
Another extension to this lesson could be a more in-depth study of British colonial policy in India and Indian nationalism. A great source for primary source documents is the Internet Indian History Sourcebook [www.fordham.edu/halsall/india/indiasbook.html#Indian%20Nationalism](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/india/indiasbook.html#Indian%20Nationalism).

One last possible way to extend this lesson would be to focus in on how the Indian nonviolent struggle for independence has been an example for people oppressed people throughout the world and has lead to numerous other successful (if not mentioned in most history books) nonviolent struggles around the world, including the Civil Rights movement in the US. The video series, *A Force More Powerful*, has five other case studies (lunch counter sit-ins, South Africa, Chile, Solidarity in Poland, and the Danish resistance to the Nazi occupation). The same producers have made a number of other documentaries (on the overthrow of Milosevic, the truth and reconciliation process and the nonviolent Ukrainian defense of their election. These same folks have also created a nonviolent strategy video game also called A Force More Powerful – the game of Nonviolent Strategy. The start of all of these projects was the book, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, which has lots of great details on many of the successful struggles of the 20th century. Another great source of material on nonviolent struggles around the world is the Albert Einstein Institution (www.aeinstein.org), which works with people all over the world who are using nonviolent struggle to win their freedom and fight oppression, and they also conduct a great deal of research on past nonviolent campaigns. Probably the best book I’ve read on the process of social change is *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*, by Bill Moyer, JoAnne MacAllister, Mary Lou Finley and Steve Soifer. This book shows the 8 steps successful movements go through, along with examples from real movements.

**Bibliography:**


**Albert Einstein Institution.** www.aeinstein.org


Appendix A

Inquiry: Can nonviolence be powerful?

We are going to watch video clips from the movie Gandhi.

Clip #1

The first scene is a negotiation between Gandhi and the British ministers and generals:

British Ambassador: “You don’t think we are just going to walk out of India?”

Gandhi: “Yes, in the end you will walk out because 100,000 English men simply can not control 350,000,000 Indians if they refuse to cooperate. And that is what we intend to achieve: peaceful, nonviolent non-cooperation, until you yourselves see the wisdom of leaving.”

1. Does what Gandhi is saying make sense to you? Why or why not?

2. Do you think that it is possible that peaceful, nonviolent non-cooperation could defeat the greatest empire the world had known up to that moment in history? Why or why not?
Clip #2
The second scene is from the raid on the Dahramsala salt mine, where the satyagrahis (activists trained for nonviolent action) marched up to the gate in wave after wave and were beaten by the guards with steal tipped lathis. The scene ends with the reporter phoning in his story: “…Whatever moral ascendancy the west held was lost today. India is free for she has taken at that steal and cruelty can give and she has neither cringed nor retreated.”

1. Why do you think this reporter chose to interpret this massacre the way he did?

2. How could all these people getting beaten by the guards prove that India was free?
Appendix B

Notes from *Defying the Crown* documentary

**Fill in the blank**

1. Gandhi: We will stop doing anything the British want us to do. This whole nation will come to a stand still; c________ d______________ on a mass scale.

2. An ashram is what kind of community? _____________________

3. Gandhi chose to start his campaign challenging the British tax and monopoly on __________.

4. He chose salt because it was an issue that effected ________________.

5. The Salt March was _______________ miles. It began in _________(month) of __________(year).

6. Gandhi said: We must not hate the British. They have not taken India from us, we have __________ __ __ _______.

7. The British saw themselves as __________ rulers.

8. He asked local leaders to _____ their jobs. “When everyone refuses to cooperate, Gandhi said, the British will be able to do nothing.”

9. Khadi was __________ - __________ cotton cloth, the informal uniform of Gandhi’s movement.

10. At the beach, Gandhi said: “Hold the salt in your fist and think it is worth 50 million rupees. That’s how much the government has been taking from us because of the __________ on salt.

11. Narayan Desai wanted his father to go to prison for no less than ___years, not just 3 months.

12. ______________ protesters took part in the raid on the Dharasana Salt works.

13. Miller’s report on the salt raid went out to almost __________ newspapers; it was also read in the US __________.

14. “Our object was to show the __________ and the ___________ of the government in all its ferocity. We have succeeded beyond measure.”

15. By July, _______ civil resisters have filled the jails. This is more than sacrifice, it is mass disobedience, and it is slowly eroding British authority.

16. If an authority enjoys power, he enjoys power to the extent that __________ is rendered. But moment obedience goes off, moment the laws are disobeyed, moment the command of the powerful are not obeyed, their power __________.
17. British trade with Indians dropped _____%. By December, _3_ out of _4_ clothing shops were closed.

18. Gandhi was the first Indian to ever _______ with a British ruler as an equal (after more than 100 years).

19. India won its freedom ____ years later, in _______.

20. Gandhi had ended the pretense of British legitimacy in India by exposing injustice and ending Indian __________ to foreign rule. He had awakened people to their own __________.

In the last quote in the documentary, Gandhi states: My technique of nonviolent struggle is at the same stage as electricity was at Edison’s time: to be refined and developed.

**Why do you think the filmmakers chose to end this documentary with this quote?**

Please write your response to this question and any other reflections you may have about this documentary and what it has taught you about the power of nonviolent action. (3-6 paragraphs on another sheet of paper)

**Extra credit until semester ends:** You can get 5 extra credit points for watching the news or reading newspapers and magazines and writing down, cutting out or printing stories that deal with nonviolent action (protests, boycotts, etc.). Every other Friday, we will spend 10 minutes discussing your stories (What was the issue? How was it reported?) I want you to do this so that you will have the opportunity to see nonviolent action in the world around them.
(answers) Notes from *Defying the Crown* documentary

**Fill in the blank**

1. Gandhi: We will stop doing anything the British want us to do. This whole nation will come to a stand still; civil disobedience on a mass scale.

2. An ashram is what kind of community? spiritual

3. Gandhi chose to start his campaign challenging the British tax and monopoly on salt.

4. He chose salt because it was an issue that effected everyone.

5. The Salt March was 240 miles. It began in March (month) of 1930 (year).

6. Gandhi said: “We must not hate the British. They have not taken India from us, we have given it to them.”

7. The British saw themselves as enlightened rulers.

8. He asked local leaders to quit their jobs. “When everyone refuses to cooperate, Gandhi said, the British will be able to do nothing.”

9. Khadi was hand-made cotton cloth, the informal uniform of Gandhi’s movement.

10. At the beach, Gandhi said: “Hold the salt in your fist and think it is worth 60 million rupees. That’s how much the government has been taking from us because of the monopoly on salt.

11. Narayan Desai wanted his father to go to prison for no less than two years, not just 3 months.

12. 2,500 protesters took part in the raid on the Dharasana Salt works.

13. Miller’s report on the salt raid went out to almost 2,000 newspapers; it was also read in the US senate.

14. “Our object was to show the fangs and the claws of the government in all its ferocity. We have succeeded beyond measure.”

15. By July, 17,000 civil resisters have filled the jails. This is more than sacrifice, it is mass disobedience, and it is slowly eroding British authority.

16. If an authority enjoys power, he enjoys power to the extent that obedience is rendered. But moment obedience goes off, moment the laws are disobeyed, moment the command of the powerful are not obeyed, their power vanishes.

17. British trade with Indians dropped 25%. By December, 3 out of 4 clothing shops were closed.

18. Gandhi was the first Indian to ever meet with a British ruler as an equal (after more than 100 years).

19. India won its freedom 16 years later, in 1947.

20. Gandhi had ended the pretense of British legitimacy in India by exposing injustice and ending Indian consent to foreign rule. He had awakened people to their own power.