**Title of Lesson:** Ahimsa and Making Nonviolent Choices with Gandhi and King

**Lesson By:** Ofelia Oronoz

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**Guiding Questions:**

- Which are the eight characteristics of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) by Gandhi?
- Which are the six principles of nonviolence by King?
- How Gandhi and King used nonviolence for making nonviolent choices?
- How these characteristics and principles are relevant to teenagers’ lives and choice making process?

**Lesson Abstract:**

In this lesson, students will first be able to identify the eight characteristics of Gandhi’s concept of ahimsa. Second, they will be able to identify the six principles and steps on nonviolence based on King’s life and legacy. Finally, students will be able to write individual and group conflict scenarios to draft nonviolent solutions using the above mentioned concept and principles.

**Lesson Content:**

First, this content essay identifies the eight of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), and how Gandhi’s this concept to make nonviolent choices in his personal and social journey. Second, the essay describes the six principles of Kingian nonviolence and how Martin Luther Jr. incorporated these to his daily life and pursuit for social changes. Finally, the essay highlights how the Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsa*, and the principles articulated by King, have particular relevancy to teenagers choice making to solve conflicts using nonviolence as proposed by Gandhi and King.

**Ahimsa in Gandhi’s life and choice making process**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, India. He dedicated his life to *ahimsa* or nonviolence. He incorporated it into his daily life, pursuit of social changes in South Africa, and later in the liberation of India from the British Empire. In his nonviolent strategies, Gandhi used marches, public speeches, boycotts, and fasting. He was a lawyer and an educated civilian. Gandhi participated in politics throughout his life, but his ultimate will was to transform people and make them believe in one another. Despite of his nonviolent life in thought and action, Gandhi died by the hand of violence being shot three times in January 30, 1948 before his prayer meeting in India.

The Gandhian *ahimsa* has eight characteristics: “courage, compassion, truth, trust, fearlessness, forgiveness, service or selflessness, and self-restraint (*Gandhi’s Journey to Nonviolence* Dr.
These characteristics are somehow interwoven. Therefore, two or more characteristics can be present in an action or choice. Then, Gandhi implemented *ahimsa* and practiced its eight characteristics to make nonviolent choices throughout his life.

Courage was present in Gandhi’s choice to disobey the registration and fingerprinting in Transvaal, South Africa. He held public speeches to invite others not to register knowing that it was the law and he could be sent to jail. “Wherein is courage required – in blowing others to pieces from behind cannon or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and to be blow to pieces?” (Parel, 1997, p 92).

Compassion and forgiveness embedded Gandhi’s refusal to press charges against his attackers at his return to South Africa with his family. Gandhi knew and could identify his attackers, but voluntarily and using *ahimsa*, he made the choice not to prosecute them. “It was the fault of the community and the government” (Fischer, 1954, p 27). In this case and in his life, he separated the violent act and its causes from the attacker. “Forgiveness is the ornament of the brave” (Fisher, 1954, p 47). As a child, Gandhi learned the importance of truth, trust and fearlessness reveling to his father that he ate meat, in an otherwise strictly vegetarian Hindu household. Later, as an adult, Gandhi always negotiated using these characteristics, especially in the Asiatic Registration with General Smuts in South Africa in 1907. “A *Satyagrahi* bids good-by to fear, he is therefore never afraid to trust his opponent. Even if the opponent plays him false twenty times the *Satyagrahi* is ready to trust him the twenty-first time, for an implicit trust in human nature, is the very essence of his creed” (Fisher, 1954, p 36). Service and selflessness accompanied Gandhi his entire life. As a child, he took care of his ill father. In South Africa, his one year visit and contract as a lawyer extended to more than twenty years of service to improve Indian’s social conditions defending individual court cases, and changing unfair laws regarding taxes and registration. Later, in India, Gandhi dedicated himself to know his own country and people, to pursuit social changes, and to try free India during many years of negotiation with the British. Finally, he practiced self-restraint continuing to give up material possessions, having an exact diet, fasting, and practicing celibacy. “Renunciation is no sacrifice…some give a donation, Gandhi gave himself…the amount of giving is determined by the intensity of the belief” (Fischer, 1954, p 34).

**Nonviolence in King’s life and choice making process in the Black Freedom Movement**

Martin Luther King Jr., born January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, was raised in a household surrounded by love and service. He was a reverend of the Baptist Church. His Ph.D. education, religious background, and studies of Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence became assess for the changes and goals needed by African Americans during the 50’s and 60’s. He became head of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) December 5, 1955. Thus, he was the main spokesperson of the Bus Boycott after the arrest of Rosa Parks. Following this galvanizing event, King chose nonviolence incorporating principles in his personal life as well as employing them as the guiding force behind the Black Freedom Movement. However, his life ended by a gunshot on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was leading sanitation workers to improve their wages and working conditions. King’s public life was short, only about twelve years, but his contribution was rich. Therefore, based on his legacy, life and writings the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolence Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia coined the six principles of Kingian nonviolence in 1982.
King’s life and his choice making process can be analyzed through these six principles:

1. **Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**

   King identified nonviolence as a tool to make choices through the life time. It came from the individual as a vital force for change and reconciliation. Then, people who chose nonviolence would use all their capabilities to take this path in simple and difficult cases. “Nonviolence is ultimately a way of life that men live by because of the sheer morality of its claim…The willingness to use nonviolence as a technique is step forward. For he who goes this far is more likely to adopt nonviolence later as a way of life.” (Carson, 2001, p 68).

2. **The beloved community is the goal.**

   Changing relationships, internal and external mental patterns are a result of nonviolence in a reconciled world where justice prevails and people strive for their full human potential. “The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle is over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor” (Carson, 2001, p 125).

3. **Attack forces of evil, not persons doing evil.**

4. **Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause to achieve a goal.**

5. **Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence.**

6. **The universe is on the side of justice.**

   These four principles are reflected in King’s declarations after the bombing of his house. January 30, 1956. “Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly…I urged each person to go straight home after the meeting and adhere strictly to our philosophy of nonviolence…He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword... We are advocating nonviolence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them.” (Carson, 2001, p 79). Despite of this personal attack to him and family, King decided to take the nonviolent path. He accepted that the attack was caused by social differences. Then, those causes needed to be change. Retaliating on others after the bombing, would undermine the Black Freedom Movement. He as a spokesperson of the Bus Boycott, made the choice to overcome his original anger repeating “You must not allow yourself to become bitter” (Carson, 2001, p 80). Then, he was able to promote an atmosphere of calmness to nurture a balance state around him, his family, and followers in his public declarations. He knew that universal justice was on his side and eventual changes would come.

The eight characteristics of *ahimsa* from Gandhi and the six principles from King come from a previous time but are relevant to teenagers today. Therefore, the eight characteristics of courage, compassion, truth, trust, fearlessness, forgiveness, service / selflessness and self-restraint coming from Gandhi could be tools for the students to choose nonviolence to solve individual or group conflicts at home or at school. Somehow, students already have experience with these characteristics. Only to mention few scenarios: any student can relate to compassion sharing a book or helping a friend to get up in the soccer field. A student can tell the truth, trust a friend and be fearless disclosing a secret, which may be revealed later causing harm. However, both friends make up their relationship and start all over again using forgiveness. Certainly, a member of the Student Council, an Environmental Officer or a fundraiser participant identifies himself with service. Finally, the players of the soccer or basketball team in any school can list the self-restraint inflicted by their training to achieve the ultimate goal of team victory.
From King’s principles, students can certainly see nonviolence as a way of life more than a simple strategy or motto, applying it to themselves and their community. Therefore, students can progressively identify that internal violence in thought and action only brings more external violence. Thus, they can attempt to make more nonviolent choices. Then, exposing the students to these characteristics and principles as a guide for identifying and making nonviolent choices in their life can nurture an individual life long transformation that may promote social changes within their school or community.

National Standards for Learning Foreign Language from the American Council of Teaching Foreign Language

Communication Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Connections Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Materials Needed:
- Word search by puzzle maker with characteristics principles
- White boards markers
- Digital story

Suggested Teaching Activities:
- Word search by puzzle maker of characteristics and principles
- Pair activity: write a definition of the concept and present a relevant situation
- Digital stories
- Oral activity with digital story asking about the concepts and nonviolent choices by Gandhi and King
- Writing relating one of the characteristics or principles to choice making in your life
- Role play for choice making based on the ahimsa concept and the Kingian principles
- Write a paragraph about what did you learn and like about these characteristics and principles

Bibliography:
Dr. King Center: Retrieved August 17, 2009 from http://www.thekingcenter.org/DrMLKingJr/
Sethia, Tara, *Gandhi’s Journey to Nonviolence*, Power point presentation on July 14, 2009, Ahimsa Center, California State Polytechnic University Pomona
The Six principles of Nonviolence, handout provided at Journeys of Nonviolence