Title of Lesson: Designing a Civilization for an Art Room

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<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/Duration of Lesson:</th>
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<td>5,6,7,8/ Art</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(3) 40 minute classes</td>
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Guiding Questions:
- What is the object/goal of an established civilization?
- What was an essential element to Gandhi’s understanding of a civilization?
- What are the true purposes of being in an art class?
- How will it help students to define a civilization for an art class?

Lesson Abstract:
The primary purpose of this lesson is to establish a truly effective way to maintain class management in the art room. This could be done by establishing a civilization in the classroom using a balanced Gandhian system including success as a student, learning techniques, existing among other students, and appreciating one’s individual method of expression.

Lesson Content:
The primary discussion of this essay is to apply the Gandhian principles of civilization to an art classroom for children. The success and management of an art room is unique given the materials and nature of what is being learned. Any teacher or parent will emphasize the importance of establishing “rules” for children. Children need to know their limits and the consequences for crossing boundaries. In a classroom, rules are typically established and posted on the wall. Later, they are referenced when doling out detentions, stern faces and suspensions. An established, active, true civilization within the classroom could create a productive nonviolent environment for artistic learning.

Mohandas Gandhi has become an icon, symbol, and practically a patriarch of nonviolence as an action. The idea of being actively nonviolent rather then a pacifist or a passive resister was what brought Britain to its imperialist knees and allowed Indians to enjoy the legal daily freedom they already experienced in their hearts. Gandhi understood without a doubt that India should belong to Indians and that a violent revolution would, at best bring violent dictatorship. “…that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake…..In other words, what they have obtained is an exact result of the means they adopted.” (Parel, 1997, pg 81-82)

Gandhi worked his whole life to advocate for equality and peace. He constantly experimented with ways to understand people, ways to live life as an individual and ways to live life as a civilization. When India regained its independence, it split into Pakistan and India. Unfortunately, but predictably this produced intense rioting, 15 million refugees and the death of hundreds of thousands of Indians. (Fischer, 1954, pg 171) Gandhi was killed in 1948 having lived less than a year under Indian Independence. He spent approximately 54 years dedicated to the pursuit of equality, social justice and freedom. He considered nonviolence and therefore
truth as the one and only means to attain such human rights. Had he begun his work at the beginning of India’s independence with fervor for civilization as he had for independence who knows how the world would be changed.

Rights cannot be gained in a vacuum no matter how nonviolent one is. People exist in civilizations and an ideal civilization was never spelled out for India. Gandhi was deeply saddened at the state of India well before the partition of two nations. “It is my deliberate opinion that India is being ground down not under the English heel but under that of modern civilization.” (Parel, 1997, pg 42) Gandhi felt the population was turning away from their spirituality while turning towards an industrialized, materialized world. Sadly, this materialization leads to holding bodily welfare on a pedestal and this leads to internal and external violence. “Materialism, in other words, is fundamentally linked to violence.” (Nagler, 2004, pg 214)

Gandhi understood civilization as “that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.” (Parel, 1997, pg 67) To understand “duty” we need to understand its opposite. Duty is not: chaos, destruction, passivity or survival. These behaviors might be our inclination but they cannot be our reason for being. Therefore we have the idea of “duty” as a positive action against our instincts. A true civilization should outline how this is achieved and thus we have from Gandhi that civilization is a direction our action take against our instincts.

The final bridge of this discussion as it relates to the classroom is to understand what that duty is for. As in, what are the goals of civilization, what is the duty exactly and why is it important? Gandhi felt that there were four primary objects of civilization. These are Power and wealth, Pleasure (including aesthetics), Ethics (behavior towards others) and Spirituality (behavior in relation to transcendent). (Anthony Parel Lecture, July 15, 2009) Where modern civilization has failed is maintaining a balance within these goals. An example of a civilization gone wrong is where the people of the United States have put an unequal value on wealth and pleasure while systematically marginalizing spirituality. “This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion.” (Parel, 1997, pg 37)

While it is arguable that Gandhi’s goals and objectives could be used in a classroom and school it would be more relevant and experimental to establish congruent goals for a growing mind. To begin, rather then establish power and wealth as a goal to be balanced let us substitute being a successful student. It is perfectly acceptable to understand the student that wants to maintain their perfect grade average (just as we can understand the goal of power and wealth). Secondly, rather then a goal of general pleasure we can understand the goal in the art room is to learn different ways to expressive themselves visually. The third goal follows the idea of ethics, however in the art room we have many ways to practice this goal. We can define it as existing among one’s peers in a successful manner that allows creativity. Lastly rather then touch on the daring topic of the transcendent, we shall work towards an intrinsic appreciation for one’s method of visual expression. As in, they will value their work and therefore themselves.

The argument for an established civilization lies in a common teacher anecdote. A class full of students watches as the teacher points to the “rules” as they look at the angry pointed finger wondering why, actually, it’s such a big deal to put paint on their face. They key is that they
don’t know the goals of the art room so putting paint on their face does not seem all that irresponsible. If this incident were discussed using the guiding question: ‘What is your purpose in this art class?’ then the student could refer back to an agreed upon civilization. (ie existing among one’s peers.) A true civilization leads us in the direction of a nonviolent and moral environment. “Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions.” (Parel, 1997, pg 67)

**State Content Standards: Massachusetts**

Standard 1 – 1.5: Expand process techniques using relief printmaking

1.8: Maintain the workspace, materials, and tools responsibly and safely

Standard 3 – 3.5: Create symbolic artwork by substituting *symbols* for objects, relationships, or ideas

3.7: Create artwork that shows knowledge of the ways in which architects, craftsmen, and designers develop abstract symbols by simplifying elements of the environment

Standard 5 – 5.6: Be able to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism

**Materials Needed:**

- Images of artwork and symbolism from various cultures and civilizations, foam print board, ink and paper, large pad and paper.

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

1. Teachers can begin their year with their class discussing what the goals of the art room should be. Students can think on and write these down individually or sit as a group. As a class we can discuss what some of the common goals are and have them established and reaffirmed for the remainder of the year.

2. Using Gandhi’s balance of purposes for civilization (Power/Wealth, Aesthetics, Ethics, and Spirituality), design a class chart showing balance of purposes for an Art Class Civilization.

3. Students can look at artwork from “civilizations” in the past (Asian, Egyptian, American Indian, and Greek as appropriate for their grade level) and each student can design a coin using symbolism and printmaking to express a goal important to them.

4. Students look at and critique each other’s coins and symbolism to analyze similarities between their civilization’s coin and the civilization that they looked at.

**Bibliography:**

