Title of Lesson: Nonviolence as a Way of Life
Lesson By: Airisenne Osterreich

| Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 5,6,7,8/ Art | Class Size: 30 | Time/Duration of Lesson: (3) 40 minute classes |

Guiding Questions:
- What is violence? What does it look like?
- What is nonviolence? What does this look like?
- Where does violence come from (ourselves? Others? Our environment)
- Is violence a response or an answer to a problem?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson is meant to address violence and nonviolence as a subject matter. There are far too many teachable moments in a child’s life to allow passage without addressing that, which underlies all problems. This lesson will discuss ways that students see violence, times in history that nonviolence is used as a solution and ways they can use nonviolence as a solution. Art will be used as a means to look at and express violence as well as nonviolence.

Lesson Content:
In schools one of the biggest challenges to face is the violence that exists for students and teachers. A school of nonviolence will necessarily be a school that can achieve whatever level of success the administrators outline. Nonviolence must be a topic of discussion and practice rather than said as a given. What is necessary in order to understand this challenge is to define violence, nonviolence and its possible roots. Of course we must look at examples of success using nonviolence and how this can be implemented in our classrooms. Mirabeau said “Civilization does nothing for society unless it is able to give form and substance to virtue.” (Iyer, R. Gandhi: Truth and Nonviolence) While a complicated term, virtue can be understood as knowing the difference between right and wrong. What Mirabeau is making clear is that virtue and civilization is pointless if society cannot make it into reality of visible form and substance. In the schools, we are dealing with that creation of form and substance as part of the education.

Violence can be described as any action or thought which does another harm. The word ‘harm’ inherently addresses the repercussions of that which hurts. Wounds can hurt but they can also harm that inner part of our heart and brain. A cut from a piece of broken glass might scar and even leave a lasting impression but it doesn’t harm us. A person who merely holds a broken glass to a young girl’s neck will not hurt her skin but will harm her understanding of safety, goodness, conscience, trust, reason, and the list goes on. While not being physically hurt a person can be harmed. A tangible weapon is not needed to do harm. The dismissive words “sticks and stones may break bones but words will never hurt you” could be one of the biggest lies adults utter to children. Consistently being told that they (the child in question) are ugly, stupid, poor and unwanted will alter that child’s life with even the softest tone. These are forms of violence we have in the classrooms and this is what we have an obligation to investigate.
protect and prevent.

The causes of violence in a school setting are exhausting in number, complexity, and interdependency. “He [Gandhi] felt that violence resulted from poverty, injustice, lack of self-discipline, selfishness and ill will.” (Sethia, pg 803.) These causes result from an ultimate lack of honesty. If administrators, statesmen and teachers could maintain a sense of well-intentioned truth (satyagraha) then the real battle against poverty and injustice could begin. Such honesty would ultimately allow these society participants to acknowledge their prejudices, judgments, shortcomings and intentions. Once the individual realizes this honesty, there is still the wall of society and compromise. Rules, standards, popular opinion, unpopular opinion are all intimidating and overwhelming. Everyone from politicians, administrators and teachers, find ways to compromise. Gandhi spoke of our duty, or dharma, as it relates to these compromises. Raghavan Iyer states of Gandhi’s words: “It is always true that dharma lies, not in securing uniformity of conception, but in striving for the idea without allowing its remoteness to tempt one into shrinking or twisting it.” (Iyer, R. Gandhi: Truth and Nonviolence) In other words, maintaining the essence of a concept is always the most important and cannot be compromised.

This needs to be understood from the perspective of adults who can promote change within a system but also as people educating children. If one leaves out the rhetoric of violence and see and speak of it as an adolescent then answers could appear. When a student wants to fight they are immediately angry at a situation. Here is where lucid conversation about their anger is important. If for example another person says something bad about them, ie: they stole someone else’s cell phone. The question: well did you steal the phone and if so what is the point exactly of getting angry rather then acknowledge the truth? If not, what exactly is the point of getting angry when you have the truth to back you up. It is important to not actually engage in this conversation unless the student has had consistent practice accepting the truth; otherwise they will be reluctant to admit to stealing a phone. This method of accepting the truth is what leads to a nonviolent reaction as an alternative. (The same can be said for any new therapeutic/psychological process)

There are examples of this conscious therapeutic behavior in American history as exemplified through Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s Autobiography. While the bus boycott of 1955 was going on, King’s home was bombed. Luckily his wife and child were okay and he immediately made a speech to the distraught and afraid African American crowd to not respond to this with violence. “Love them and let them know you love them,” he said from his bombed porch. (King, Martin Luther. Autobiography of, pg 80) However, it was that evening in solitude, which shows us Dr King’s practice at nonviolence. “…I could feel the anger rising when I realized that my wife and baby could have been killed…..I was once more on the verge of corroding hatred. And once more I caught myself and said: ‘You must not allow yourself to become bitter.’” Dr King was not immune to such anger and he had to consistently practice the finesse of nonviolence in his heart and in his words.

The nonviolent protests of the Civil Right Movement had a gentleman by the name of Reverend James Lawson to teach and test people in nonviolence as a practice. People involved with the nonviolent struggle for racial equality had to undergo specified training. This meant they needed to have someone humiliate them terribly using words and fists, as they would in the
actual protest. Nonviolence does not happen because a person decides it will happen that day. Everyone would have the best of intentions to maintain civility and peace, however, when faced with physical and emotional pain there is an intense adrenaline rush that connects with anger. One can only control this through practice.

A fortunate yet extremely sad fact is that many students are faced with opportunities to practice nonviolence many times a day and teachers need to harness and exploit these opportunities. The argument for nonviolence (ahimsa) lays in the truth that violence does not work. It does not work to yell at a child because they yell out in class just as it does not work for a child to hit another because “they started it.” The truth and reality of nonviolence exists in the love we have for the students. Teachers cannot control their behavior; they can merely demonstrate and exemplify the change they wish to occur.

Massachusetts State Content Standards:
Standard 3- 3.6: Create artwork that employs the use of free form symbolic imagery that demonstrates personal invention, and/or conveys ideas and emotions
Standard 4 – 4.4: Produce work that shows an understanding of the concept of craftsmanship
Standard 5 – 5.6: Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism
Connection Standard 7 – Students will be able to recognize and describe the roles of artists in the community.

Materials Needed:
- Artwork which portrays abstractly and figuratively the concepts of violence and nonviolence.
- Art materials for the third activity of creating expressive artwork. (paints, pastels etc.)

Suggested Teaching Activities:
1. Students will have an open, teacher led discussion about violence and what it is. Students should be pressed to recognize how often they see violence in their daily lives and how they interact with the violence. Students can either use words to express how they feel about this violence or they can use drawing as a means of expression.
2. Show video of Reverend Lawson’s nonviolence training for the lunch counter sit ins. Have a discussion about the idea of practicing to be nonviolent. Also, why this worked.
3. Students look at artwork to discuss the presence of violence or nonviolence. They should be able to articulate how an image is one or the other and if they can relate to it. Students can use free writing to respond to one of the pieces answering questions: how is this violent/nonviolent? Can you relate to the subject matter? What role is the artist playing as a person depicting such imagery?
4. Students can create a visual piece of art relating to their experiences of violence within their community. They should think of the artwork as an act of nonviolent protest against whatever violence they are dealing with.

Bibliography:
King, Martin Luther. The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.. Edited by Clayborne Carson, IPM; Abacus © 2000.