Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title: Exploring nonviolent themes in various literary genres

Lesson By: Lauren Petzold

Grade Level/Subject Areas: Sixth Grade/Language Arts

Duration of Lesson: Three 60 min sessions

Colorado State Standards Addressed:
2.1.a.ii: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments. (CCSS: RL.6.2)

2.1.c.ii Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics. (CCSS: RL.6.9)

Common Core Standards Addressed:
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Lesson Abstract:
Students will read the fictional text, “The Buddha and the Terrorist” (Chapter 1) and the nonfiction article, “Why did Gandhi march 240 miles for salt?” Students will then compare and contrast the presentation of similar themes within these two texts through an essay.

Guiding Questions:
What is nonviolence?
How can nonviolence be transformative?
Is there courage in nonviolence?

Content Essay

“Non-violence requires a double faith, faith in God and also faith in man,” – Mahatma Gandhi. Literature provides various examples of nonviolent themes. The narrative, Buddha and the Terrorist, provides an example of one man’s transformation because of Buddha’s compassion and nonviolent methods. Gandhi’s Salt March demonstrates the power of nonviolence on a much larger, national scale. Each of these examples requires faith. This faith must believe in
nonviolence as an effective mode for change. There must also be faith in the innate good of humankind so that a person or a group can be transformed.

In the Buddhist tradition, the story of Angulimala is used to demonstrate the power of nonviolence in even the most seemingly hopeless and problematic of situations. The story is used, “to show that there is another way, a more effective way, to overcome terror than the way of meeting fire with fire,” (Kumar, 2). The narrative illustrates the transformation of Angulimala, a violent criminal, by the Buddha through nonviolent means of dialogue and example.

A friend and follower, Nandini, tells Buddha of the atrocities that Angulimala has committed and begs Buddha to remain inside and safe from this terrorist so as not to be killed. Buddha explains to Nandini that Buddha does not change his plans out of fear and continues his journey. This fearlessness translates into courage and a lack of focus on “self.” Fearlessness is one component of the nonviolent nature to which Buddha has committed himself. Buddha is concerned with what effect his actions will have on Angulimala so that he can come to know the source of true power as well as true happiness.

When he meets Angulimala, Buddha calls his name and offers his friendship. This action demonstrates his compassion for all humanity. Rather than see Angulimala as his actions, he views him as a fellow being with a fundamentally good nature. Buddha insists on seeing this good and to help Angulimala restore himself to his own, basic goodness. Through his subsequent discourse with Angulimala, Buddha is able to ascertain the root cause of the man’s behavior. He enables Angulimala to not only reflect on his past but to take accountability for his own actions. Buddha helps Angulimala to see that he has only been abandoned due to his choices and actions. He enables Angulimala to see the truth: he was not abandoned by humanity, but rather, he abandoned his own humanity. The Buddha also allows Angulimala to see that, “when you kill, you kill non other than yourself. Because I am none other than you, and you are non other than me. Whatever you do to me, you do unto yourself;” (Kumar 14). Buddha explains to Angulimala that the world and all of its inhabitants are connected. He also explains the futility of seeking revenge and provides the illustration, “Fire cannot be put out with more fire,” (Kumar, 26). Buddha shows Angulimala that the universe and all of its creatures are connected. We get back what we put into the world. Angulimala isolated himself from others through his choices.

Ultimately, Buddha shows him that through the power of love, he can be restored as a peaceful friend to all.

Buddha provides the analogy of the lotus flower and its appealing qualities. He explains that we, too, can be like the lotus flower when we take control of our own actions, and thus our own destiny. Angulimala becomes Buddha’s disciple and lives as a monk in Jeta Grove. Buddha transformed a man full of rage, hate and violence into an empathetic, compassionate man through his nonviolent discourses. Angulimala was able to see that true power comes from love rather than violence.

In much the same way, Gandhi was able to undermine on facet of the power that the British wielded over India: the salt tax. The salt was taxed in order to support its import into India and served to pay the traders. Indians felt that this tax was and unjust burden imposed by the British. In regards to the tax, Gandhi said, “Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor…” (Sethia, 111). Being so, Gandhi knew that action had to be taken.

Adhering to his commitment to nonviolence, Gandhi first began his movement through the nonviolent principle of truth by alerting the British Viceroy, Lord Irwin, of his plans. In his public letter, Gandhi expresses his feelings regarding the tax and his desire to compromise with the British. He addresses Irwin as “friend” and is clear that the fault lies with the system not with
any individual. Gandhi actually feels compassion for Lord Irwin, as he is a part of a flawed system. However, he calls Irwin to see this truth and to be a part of the change to move their society in the right direction. Gandhi explains that he will march, with other followers, to the sea and make salt, which was illegal at this time. As a part of his nonviolent movement, Gandhi has no fear of the consequences of his action. He tells Irwin that he knows that he will be able to, “frustrate my design by arresting me,” (Gandhi, Letter to Irwin). Gandhi then assures him that there will be thousands more who will continue with the movement if this happens. In the conclusion of his letter, Gandhi offers the opportunity to discuss the matter face to face so as not to begin the march. Because Lord Irwin did not fulfill this request, the march commenced.

During the march, Gandhi and his followers traveled for twenty four days a total distance of two hundred forty one miles to the coast of Dandi. While on the journey, Gandhi continued to conduct his daily rituals such as prayer and community discussion. At each stop along the way, he would speak to the people. “Gandhi condemned the salt tax, appealed to villagers to violate the salt laws, asked village officials to resign their posts, and exhorted all to join the march,” (Sethia, 114). In this way, Gandhi continued to spread his nonviolent message by encouraging civil disobedience. He did not do this in secret or try to plan covert missions. Rather, he made his calling public. He provided the truth in his journey.

By the time Gandhi and his fellow marchers arrived at the sea, global media journalists were covering the event. Several thousand marchers had joined him by this time. Gandhi warned everyone about the risk of arrest and reminded his followers not to resist the arrest under any circumstances. On April 6, Gandhi and many others all over India defied the salt laws by picking up salt at the sea. There were numerous arrests, but this was expected. Gandhi, however, was not arrested. Lord Irwin worried about what effect Gandhi’s arrest would have on the movement. In this way, Gandhi’s nonviolent movement was affirmed. Through civil disobedience, the British saw that they were unable to prevent the Indians from reaching their goal. Since he was not arrested and was able to continue his movement, Gandhi sent another letter to Lord Irwin informing him of his plans to enter the Dharasana Salt Works, which is where India’s salt was being manufactured. At this point, Irwin decided to arrest Gandhi. Gandhi’s followers were even more determined, and they followed through with the plan.

Although Gandhi’s movement was unsuccessful in ending the salt tax, it was a triumph:

To the Indians at large, it demonstrated the power of nonviolent civil disobedience and infused in them a greater sense of pride and confidence in seeking swaraj. To those who had participated in the movement and had gone through the training in the discipline necessary for nonviolence and civil disobedience, the salt satyagraha and ensuing imprisonment enabled them to discover within themselves unknown reserves of soul force and reinforced among them a sense of fearlessness… Finally and most importantly, it brought the British and the Indians to the negotiating table. (Sethia, 115)

The salt march is an eternal example of how a nonviolent movement for change can transform all parties involved. Those seeking justice are emboldened and their fears subside. They find conviction and strength knowing that they stand on the side of the heart and of truth. Those whom are being influenced to make change cannot help but to see truth in light of the movement. Love and honesty open their eyes to their own moral character.

Both “The Buddha and the Terrorist” and, “Why did Gandhi march 240 miles for salt?” show the monumental transformation that can arise through the elements of nonviolence. By
determining the structure of a movement through the lens of compassion and truth, the action will be kind. In knowing this truth, its proponents will be strengthened by love and understanding without fear. In turn, those who need to make change will be more likely to understand this need and look into their own hearts to see their connection to others.

Bibliography:


Teaching Activities:

Day 1:

Introduction (20 minutes): Present the daily objective and demonstration of learning. Deliver PowerPoint presentation introducing Gandhi and explaining the background of the East India Trading Company salt tax imposed by the British in India.

Group Exercise (15 minutes): Group students. Present the following scenario: Colorado Springs has been plagued by drought for the past few years. It has led to wildfires and other local problems. Imagine that Colorado Springs Utilities puts a tax on your water bill. Every time your water usage bill is calculated, 25% of your bill will be added on as a supplementary tax to help deter people from overusing water. Is this just? (Students will be given 2 minutes to talk in groups and one representative will share out the ideas in a whip around.) Next, challenge students to come up with three ways in which to deal with this injustice. (Students are given 5 minutes to come up with their three solutions. A new representative will write the group’s three solutions on butcher paper after sharing with the class. These solutions will remain for the duration of the lesson. (At this point, there will be no discussion or reflection of the shared ideas.)

Independent Work (25 minutes): Remind students of the current objective and deliver the independent assignment. Students will read The Buddha and the Terrorist Chapter 1 and “Why did Gandhi march 240 miles for salt?” When finished reading, students will complete a graphic organizer to identify the common theme presented in both texts, ways in which the theme’s deliver is the same and ways in which it is different. If students finish early, they should respond to the prompt, “Which text conveys the common theme more effectively in your opinion? Justify your response using details from the text as well as your own reaction.
Day 2:

Review (5 minutes) Revisit the objective from the lesson that began yesterday. Discuss the synopsis of each text. Take out graphic organizers.

Group Work (10 minutes) Students self select groups of three. Discuss the common theme, similarities, and differences. Teacher selects group representative to share out ideas.

Whole Group Discussion (10 minutes): Allow time for students to share ideas and react to one another’s reflections regarding the texts.

Independent Work (35 minutes): Students begin planning and drafting their essay responding to the prompt: What common theme was presented in The Buddha and the Terrorist Chapter 1 and “Why did Gandhi march 240 miles for salt?”? Compare and contrast the ways in which this theme was presented.

Day 3:

Independent Work (45 minutes): Students continue to plan and draft. When planning and drafting are complete, students write their name on the white board. Teacher will confer with each student to read over draft and make any suggestions or clarify, Students will begin their final copies.

Discussion (15 minutes): Review students’ solutions to the issue of water taxation in Colorado Springs. Look at each solution and determine whether or not it can be considered nonviolent.

Discuss the guiding questions:

What is nonviolence?
How can nonviolence be transformative?
Is there courage in nonviolence?

*Students who do not finish their essay in class should turn the essay in the following day during class.

Materials Needed:
PowerPoint Presentation and projection screen or SMART Board
Copies of readings
Butcher paper
Markers
Writing supplies