Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title: The Value of Work

Unit Question: What type of work is most valuable?

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
7th Grade Accelerated Reading

Duration of Lesson:
50 minutes/day; 3-5 days.

Nevada Content Standards:
7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
7.7 7. Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version.

Lesson Abstract:
Nonviolence, service and self-sacrifice were all teachings of Gandhi that resonated with Cesar Chavez. These ideas led Cesar to form what is known today as the United Farm Workers. (UFW) Several victories have been won but there are many more issues of farm worker rights. Every job brings a sense of dignity and worth. This lesson strives to emphasize the value of work while focusing on the injustices dealt to migrant farm workers in America today.

Guiding Questions:
Are some jobs more important than others?
How do job conditions influence family life – and why is that important?
Why was Cesar Chavez concerned about worker rights?
In what ways were Chavez and the UFW influenced by the teachings of Gandhi?
What advances have been made in farm worker rights and what still needs to be done?

Content Essay:

When I was young my Father said “There is no shame in honest work.” Today there are seemingly limitless professions in the world. Many are held in high esteem and thus paid enormous amounts of money for their services. Conversely, others are held in low esteem and paid extremely low wages. Remembering my first job working as a janitor in college, there was a sense of dignity and worth in working and receiving an income. All honest labor is worthwhile. It is the value of work that this lesson strives to emphasize while focusing on the injustices dealt to migrant farm workers in America today.
A closer look at the lives of migrant farm workers reveals deplorable working conditions, living conditions and abject poverty. Many people see this disparity, feel helpless to do anything and resort to living-up to the status quo. This trap of living up to the current or existing state of affairs is what Gandhi referred to when he said, “A man laboring under the bane of civilization is like a dreaming man.” (Gandhi p34) More and more people look down on those who labor in occupations of lower income. Mankind is intoxicated by the luxuries that money can buy, continually compelled to acquire the latest and greatest convenience.

Speaking of higher-paid professions Gandhi said, “In what way are they more profitable to the country than the laborers? Are those who do good entitled to greater payment? And, if they have done anything for the country for the sake of money, how shall it be counted as good?” (Gandhi p58.) The same questions could be asked of any profession. If these questions were the true test of which job is indeed important and/or valuable, the fabric and nature of our lives would be vastly different. Gandhi himself described this ideal as a place where, “no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labor.” (Gandhi p182)

In Calcutta on February 26, 1940, Gandhi talked of the power of nonviolence (ahimsa) and it’s inseparable connection to work. “Ahimsa in theory no one knows. It is as indefinable as God. But in its working we get glimpses of it as we have glimpses of the Almighty in His working amongst and through us.” (Harijan) Without work, ahimsa is just a fruitless dream. Each human must/should work to live. Each person contributing work within their physical limits and abilities is a positive force influencing each individual as well as the whole community. Rabindranath Tagore captures this sentiment in the following lines:

I slept and dreamt
That life was joy
I woke and saw
That life was duty
I acted, And behold!
Duty was joy!

Of the Satyagrahis (people who follow Satyagraha or firmness in the true cause of Ahimsa) Gandhi said, “Whether barristers or others, they learnt the dignity of labor.” (Harijan) All labor is dignified. The labor of the Lawyer or the Doctor is not considered to be of any higher value than that of the maid or farm worker. Each individual’s labor is a positive force contributing to the whole. Each individual’s labor is a valuable asset for everyone.

Gandhi was deeply influenced by his mother’s religious nature, common sense and regular fasts. (Sethia p12) Similarly, the mother of Cesar Chavez was also deeply religious including her children as she served the less fortunate. These acts of service left a lasting impression, which served as a guide for Cesar’s life. (Orosco p24) Also like Gandhi, Chavez loved to read. Among the books that influenced his life were those he read about the life and teachings of Gandhi. Nonviolence, service and self-sacrifice were all teachings of Gandhi that resonated with Cesar. These readings, the impressions of his childhood and the glaring injustices he and other farm workers lived with led Cesar to form the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, later known as the United Farm Workers (UFW).
The first big issue the union dealt with was the Delano Grape Strike. It would become one of the longest union struggles in U.S. labor history and through it Cesar was able to mesh the lessons of his childhood and culture with the ideals of nonviolence. In Cesar’s Sacramento March Letter of 1966, he detailed three essential goals of the Grape Strike. First, the march from Delano to Sacramento would be called a pilgrimage. The word pilgrimage in Mexican culture has special and significant meaning. By calling the march a pilgrimage, Cesar brought the spirit of sacrifice to the journey. Second, when Cesar began his fast, he called it penance. He was suffering for a purpose as a way of meditation and self-reflection. Penance is also deeply rooted in Mexican culture as is fasting. The fast to Cesar was a way to examine motives, purify self and purge ideas of revenge and anger. Third, Cesar called the strike a continuation of the Mexican revolution in a nonviolent way. (Orosco) To put an end to the unjust system farm workers endure. Put an end to substandard education, working and living conditions, meager wages and inhuman treatment. Each of these methods, pilgrimage, penance and nonviolent revolution became the basis of solving social justice problems of the oppressed migrant workers in the United States.

As a result of the long Grape Strike, workers won their first industry-wide pay hike in eight years and the first genuine union contract between a grower and farm workers’ union in U.S. history was negotiated. (Fair Treatment for Farm Workers Act.) Several victories have been won since the grape strike including the elimination of the short hoe. However, farm workers continue to labor under extreme conditions that other industries have successfully curtailed.

The UFW is currently working on several key campaigns. Farm workers use their union contracts to enforce state and federal protections such as California’s regulation aimed at preventing death and illness from extreme heat. Governor Brown of California recently vetoed the Fair Treatment for Farm Workers Act. This act would have made it a little easier for farm workers to win union contracts and thus enforce state and federal protections. In another campaign, Farm workers at Giumarra Vineyards are organizing to win a United Farm Workers union contract. Approximately one out of every ten bunches of grapes picked in the U.S. comes from workers of Giumarra Vineyards. (Giumarra/Nature’s Partner Campaign.)

There are many more issues and campaigns for farm worker rights. As we continue to educate the public and employ the nonviolent methods of pilgrimage, penance and revolution that Cesar Chavez instituted with migrant workers, we inch closer to the ideal of every occupation deemed dignified and worthwhile. It is my belief that social justice begins with each person. Every person makes a difference.

Bibliography:


Harijan, 2-3-1940 (http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL078.PDF) & (http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL077.PDF)


Tagore, Rabindranath. http://thinkexist.com/quotation/i_slept_and_dreamt_that_life_was_joy-i_awoke_and/144020.html


Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:
First of all, I am a proponent of Journaling… 99% of the following activities will be followed with some type of writing/journal prompt in my class – especially after a lively discussion! As far as the following activities are concerned, I feel it is important for teachers to be able to work this information into their curriculum easily – therefore, I have listed activities rather than detailed rigorous plans. In this way, anyone could “pick and choose” what works best for them – and better yet, add something more intellectually simulating!

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Digital Story: “Farm Workers” by Avis Pickens
After showing the story, commence a class discussion on the value of work. Are there jobs that are more important than others? How do job conditions influence family life – and why is that important? What does “The American Dream” mean and why do we call it a dream?

Book: The Circuit; Stories from the life of a migrant child. by Francisco Jimenez
Split class into small groups – each group is given a different story from the book to read, illustrate and present to the class.

Biography sources:
http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?inc=history/07.html&menu=research
http://www.enchantedlearning.com/history/us/hispanicamerican/chavez/
http://www.cesarechavezfoundation.org/
http://clnet.ucla.edu/research/chavez/bio/
**Need to schedule a computer lab or laptop cart for the Biography activity. Students will go on a scavenger hunt per se to compare and contrast at least 3 biography sites on Cesar Chavez. Are there ambiguities? What are some things all sites agree upon? What are some aspects of Cesar Chavez’s life you feel need further research and why? Name at least 3 people Cesar looked up to and why. (Journal prompt: Do you feel Cesar Chavez would want us to glorify him as a “hero”? Explain your thinking.)

Movie: Viva La Causa – from Teaching Tolerance; a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (It should take at least one full period to view this movie…. Plan discussion for the next day or a writing prompt as homework that will be used the next day to facilitate discussion.)

Discussion – How is the movie similar/different to the biographies you researched? Why do you think the pilgrimage march to Sacramento was successful? What is it about nonviolence that helped others to see and understand the plight of farm workers?

Digital Stories:
http://www.ufw.org/
http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/cesarchavez1.html
http://library.thinkquest.org/26504/History.html

**Reserve a computer lab or laptop cart for this activity. Students will work in pairs. Each pair is to research one event in UFW history. The event must be one involving nonviolent action on the part of farm workers/ UFW. Create a power point or I movie complete with voiceover to present to the class. *BE SURE to explain how the event affected the lives of farm workers and how it furthered the UFW’s goals.

Cumulative Essay:
Students will write an essay about the advances that have been made in farm worker rights and what still needs to be done to help the plight of farm workers today. Each student should also explain their belief about the value of work and back it up with a quote from Gandhi or Chavez.

Other Quotes for discussion/etc:

“Why do they (doctors and lawyers) want more fees than common laborers? Why are their requirements greater? In what way are they more profitable to the country than the laborers? Are those who do good entitled to greater payment? And, if they have done anything for the country for the sake of money, how shall it be counted as good?” Mohandas Gandhi, Hind Swaraj p58.
“When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men!”
Cesar Chavez’ statement on ending his fast, delivered by James Drake at Delano, California — March 10, 1968.

“That’s how you come to believe, to the very core of your being, that work is more than a paycheck. It’s dignity. It’s respect. It’s about whether or not you can look your children in the eye and say: We’re going to be all right.” Joseph R. Biden Jr. Speech at the Democratic National Convention, August 27, 2008.

“The sum of wisdom is that time is never lost that is devoted to work.” Ralph Waldo Emerson.
http://thinkexist.com

“There is no royal road to any learning, no matter what it is. … There is no royal road to anything that is worthwhile. Nothing that is deserving of earning or of cherishing comes except through hard work. I care not how much of a genius you may be, the rule will still hold” (J. Reuben Clark Jr., as quoted in Vital Quotations, comp. Emerson Roy West [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], pp. 401–2).