Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title:
The Gold Coin: Individuals and Community

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
4-6 grade Language Arts,

Duration of Lesson:
Five 60 minute lessons

Content Standards:
Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures. (CCSS: RL.4.9) Grade 4, standard 2, c.iii

Lesson Abstract:
Students will learn about the principals of Gandhi including trusteeship and the value of manual labor. Students will discuss the value of being a part of the community by reading the text “The Gold Coin” by Alma Flor Ada. Juan is a criminal but while trying to steal ends up working in the fields with his community. Can a man, once a thief, heal himself and become a part of the community again?

Guiding Questions:
How does working with one’s hands build character?
What are the differences between concern for the individual and concern for the community?
Through a study of the life and works of Gandhi, how can an individual learn to contribute and participate in their community?

Content Essay:

Gandhi Background
Mohandas Gandhi was born in 1869 into a well to do family living in Porbandar, India. At this time, India continued to be ruled by the British ever since the early seventeenth century with the arrival of the English East India Company. Gandhi grew up with “a sense of respect for religious pluralism” and his family modeled respect for people of different faiths (Sethia 10). This “openness to outside values” (Parel lxv) eventually led Gandhi toward working for equality and rights for all individuals and for the freedom of the Indian nation from British rule.

Gandhi studied law in England in 1888 and returned briefly to India before accepting a position as a legal aid in South Africa in 1893. During his time in South Africa, Gandhi was the victim of racial discrimination and vowed to work with the Indian community to identify root causes and address these issues. Gandhi felt that “change begins at the individual level and that,
for social reform to take effect, one must first reform one’s way of living” (Sethia 29). He spent many years in South Africa working for and with the Indians living there for fair treatment, rights, and an end to racial discrimination.

In 1915 Gandhi returned to India to work for the good of the Indian people trying to repeal unfair practices and remove the British from rule to gain Indian independence. Gandhi utilized nonviolent, ahimsa, practices and civil disobedience to work toward self-rule. This work lasted through official Indian independence and partition into India and Pakistan in 1947 and Gandhi’s death in 1948.

**Phoenix Settlement**

In 1904 Gandhi purchased land and established a self-sustaining community. In this Phoenix Settlement, Gandhi’s began “his vision of sarvodaya – the well-being of all” (Sethia 42). With his extended family and other families, Gandhi worked toward principals that included the “welfare of all, simplicity, self-reliance, and dignity of labor” (Sethia 43). Additionally, Gandhi proposed swadeshi, an idea that true freedom mean self-reliance within one’s own country. In addition to boycotting British products, Gandhi proposed the production of khadi, a traditional handspun fabric. Instead of relying on foreign mercantile, Gandhi argued that the production of khadi involved an entire industry that helped employ and bring economic independence to the India. Gandhi himself spun cotton several hours a day his entire life partially to symbolize this idea of swadeshi and the importance of labor with ones hands.

**Trusteeship**

Gandhi advocated for wealthy community members to show compassion for all the members of the community. He did not mandate a formula, tax, or socialized structure mandating redistribution of wealth, but instead called for the voluntary care of the poor. The Gandhian model instructed citizens to be aware of their community and take care of others as they cared for their own family.

Research supports the idea that happiness does not come from wealth. “Authentic happiness is derived through relationships with family, friends, meaningful work, and engagement in our community rather than through a relentless striving for material possessions” (O’Brien). Along with the positive impact of helping others, research suggests that once basic needs are met, additional income does not mean increased happiness (O’Brien). As an individual achieves true self-rule, their true happiness and value no longer lies in possessions or wealth, but in the freedom and well-being of other people.

**Swaraj through Physical Labor**

Gandhi’s foundational message was communicated through his writing, Hind Swaraj. The text outlines many opinions and ideas Gandhi had for a nonviolent transition into a free India with a nation of citizens freed from the systems and expectations that hindered their well-being and individual self-rule. In this text he critiques the modern, industrialized culture and finds the transition toward Western culture moving many Indians away from traditional and valuable mindsets and habits in the interest of speed and modernization. “Manual labor came to be looked upon as fit only for the “backward” and the illiterate” (Sethia 59). With the shift toward profit driven industry, labor became simply a task, not a way of life.

To answer the self-proposed question, “What is civilization?” Gandhi outlines his rejection of industrialized, Western culture that demanded little of the individual and promoted
wealth and consumerism as the highest values. “They [our forefathers] saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet” (Parel 67). Physical labor that met economic and basic needs supported the Indians financially and in the quality in which they spent their lives.

**Individuals and Community**

Gandhi taught that the only way to achieve a healthy community is through the swaraj of the individual. When an individual gains self-rule in their thought action only then can they contribute toward the community. “For Gandhi, self-rule was the first step in a dispassionate and selfless engagement with the social and political reality.” For the individual to fully participate in community, they must be able to exhibit swaraj over their own life before fully contributing to the community.

**The Buddha and the Terrorist**

A retelling of a legend in Buddhist scripture, Satish Kumar speaks of the great pain in the world, the power of forgiveness and the redemption of the individual. The text can work as a model for community restoration through nonviolence. The community has the opportunity to encounter a person who is acting without self-rule, and offers the opportunity for a different model for community forgiveness and restoration. An outcast, Angulimala “uses violent means to seek power and gain control” (Kumar 2). The Buddha goes to seek out Angulimala to offer friendship and an opportunity to change. “You are capable not only of killing. You are also capable of loving, you are capable of compassion. You are capable of change, you are capable of friendship” (Kumar 15). With this offer and fearless concern for the life of another, the Buddha befriends Angulimala and guides his transformation into “Ahimsaka (‘The Nonviolent One’)” (Kumar 31). Angulimala is offered friendship in return when he threatens to kill the Buddha. This stark contrast allows Angulimala to see his real desire is not to kill, but to be accepted and connected to another compassionate creature.

The Buddha suggests that the root cause of the violence and unhappiness was Angulimala himself. “Angulimala, as you were the cause of your suffering, you are also the key to your happiness, your source of joy. Inner power gives you peace which is enduring” (Kumar 30). With this power to sustain the self, Ahimsaka becomes a monk who can translate and communicate sincerely and compassionately with his community. Here this idea of inner power is echoed in Gandhi’s idea of swaraj. The desire and interest in ruling others is not only impossible, but unfulfilling without the rule over one’s self. With this inner power, (or in terms of Gandhi, soul-force) individuals can find peace within, instead of looking outward to try to sustain their desires and needs.

**The Gold Coin**

“The Buddha and the Terrorist” helps to demonstrate many of Gandhi’s principals in action, but is most appropriate for older students. Elementary students can see many similar themes in Alma Flor Ada’s, “The Gold Coin.” Ada’s work shows how a thief, Juan, finds self-rule, community, and meaning through the work he contributes to the community with his hands and feet. Through this process he is restored as a contributing member of society instead of a criminal acting on the fringes, unaccepted, unloved, and unfulfilled. In a hero’s journey through the hands and feet of a criminal, Juan finds an old woman who he hears has a gold coin. Hoping to steal this and any other wealth she might have, Juan follows the woman around the
countryside over the course of a week hoping to catch up with her and take her gold. Along the way, Juan receives information from the community about where the woman, a healer of the sick, has traveled. As he meets people, they offer to help him find the woman after they complete their work. In an effort to facilitate his travels, Juan begins to help and contribute to the labor in the fields and joins the community for work, meals, and connection. When he is finally able to catch up with the woman and is even offered the gold coin, he is finally able to refuse the gold and instead begins to correct his mistakes and serve others. This transformation occurs through the communities’ acceptance of an outsider, his labor and meaningful work, and the realization that happiness and self-worth is not found through wealth but in relationships and experiences with the community.

Bibliography:


Teaching Activities
Day 1:
Teacher introduces Gandhi as a historical figure. Include philosophy on labor, community, soul-force and non-violence.

Introduce the thematic framework of working for the community or the individual. Have students share examples from the class or personal experiences.
Read “The Gold Coin” and clarify plot, setting, characters. Discuss the Hero’s Journey model of literature and map how Juan could fit this model.

Day 2:
 Explain the Charkha Wheel and Gandhi’s vision of every Indian spinning to shut down the mechanized English textile factories.

Reread “The Gold Coin.” Have students annotate or sticky note areas where characters show concern for the individual (mark with an “i”) and where characters act in the best interest of the community (mark with a “c”).

Discuss vocabulary – consider using Marzano’s 6-step vocabulary method
Day 3:
Partners read “The Gold Coin” and use Read and Respond questions to guide reading selections. Answer questions using textual evidence in an “answer, prove (quote), explain” model of writing.

Day 4:
Students will pre-write discussion topics and ideas for Friday’s discussion (or Socratic seminar). Encourage students to include quotations and consider multiple points of view in their answers to prepare their responses and defense during the discussion on Day 5.

Day 5: Group discussion with teacher and student generated questions related to the idea of working for the individual vs. community.

To facilitate a student led discussion, consider using these prompts or questions to guide students and build their answers.
1. Where is your evidence (in the text)?
2. Agree or disagree?
3. What do you mean by that?
4. Can you say more about that idea?

If you are interested in giving a grade for the student discussion, see the discussion rubric.

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<th>Class Discussion Rubric</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cite text when making an argument</td>
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<td>Include page number</td>
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<td>Briefly restate what another participant said when commenting</td>
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<td>Be respectful and civil</td>
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<td>Be concise</td>
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<td>Stay on point</td>
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<td>Avoids distracting verbal or behavior. (Ex. “like” or “you know”)</td>
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<td>Comes to discussion prepared with materials</td>
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<td>Knowledge of text is obvious through discussion responses</td>
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<td>Asks questions that are helpful to the discussion</td>
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Optional Extension: Have students research one of the movements Gandhi worked on that was successful through the use of a large number of people working together toward a common goal with self-restraint and self-rule. Options might include the Salt March, Indian Independence, South African “Epic March” in 1913, Textile Boycott etc.

Utilizing Gandhi’s idea of work in the community, have the students participate in a community service or school improvement day.

Materials Needed

  or
- Grade 4 Junior Great Book Student Anthologies
- Internet research access
- Accompanying teaching presentation