Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title: Building Sustainable Happiness through Classroom Community

Lesson By: Karin Rose, Fremont Elementary School, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Grade Level/Subject Areas: 3-6th grade

Duration of Lesson: 30 minutes/week all year or as time allows

Content Standards:
Research and Reasoning: Identifying implications, concepts, and ideas enriches reasoning skills;
   a. Consider negative as well as positive implications of their own thinking or behavior, or others thinking or behavior
   b. State, elaborate, and give an example of a concept (for example, state, elaborate, and give an example of friendship or conflict)
   c. Identify the key concepts and ideas they and others use
   d. Ask primary questions of clarity, significance, relevance, accuracy, depth, and breadth

Colorado State Standards Grade 4.4.2.

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson helps to connect the model of Oceanic Circles that Gandhi proposed as a model for sustainable life in community with the instruction of virtues as a component of character education to promote sustainable happiness. Gandhi worked to help individuals achieve swaraj, or self-rule. Many character virtues can be summed up in the idea of swaraj and sarvodaya or concern for the welfare of all.

Guiding Questions:
How can we use virtues to develop a caring community within the classroom?
How can character development build sustainable happiness?
How can Gandhi’s idea of swaraj and sarvodaya bring about happiness?

Content Essay:
Purpose for Integrating Sustainable Happiness through Virtues
Happiness can certainly be defined in many ways, but in essence, the individual experience and ability to rule one’s self and control the self not only brings a sense of power and freedom, but certain levels of happiness. Gandhi described swaraj, or self-rule, as the desired state for Indians and for India. He argued that India could not consider to be a free country until individuals began to find their own self-rule. I would suggest that students and adults alike are continually looking for this manifestation of happiness, although often in the wrong places. Before we can consider happiness as a goal, the idea of nonviolence must be considered. An individual, community and world that continues to act in violence toward itself or other living things cannot sustain total and complete happiness. “The idea of nonviolence is rooted in unity, oneness, and the integrity of the whole. When we see a difference, we start the process of violence” (Sethia). Gandhi’s swaraj brings about change and recognition in the individual about the power and joy that comes from self-control. With the individual working toward swaraj, the community can begin to pursue
sarvodaya, the uplift or welfare of all. This harnessing of energy towards the good causes a model for sustainable happiness that is rooted in principals and not situational or material influences. This idea of virtue as an avenue to happiness finds similar root in the work of Gandhi and his promotion of swaraj of the self, leading to sarvodaya, or freedom for the people. This freedom is not just an isolated individual or political freedom, but the freedom from self-doubt and circumstances that might make an individual perceive their life as unhappy and living without a content spirit.

Throughout history, religions, philosophers and the curious have all worked to try to answer, “What is happiness?”

**Aristotle**

Aristotle, a scientist, philosopher and founder of the Lyceum scientific institute was a proponent of liberal arts education, whereby the whole person “including one’s moral character” (Pursuit of Happiness 1) is educated. Through this education of the whole person, individuals can work toward achieving the goal of happiness, a key purpose and pursuit in life. In his Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle argued that “happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (Pursuit of Happiness 2). To achieve this virtue and happiness the idea of the “golden mean” was discussed as a middle path between “excess and deficiency” (Pursuit of Happiness 4) to maintain a stable but focused life. These moral characters built on virtues include many of the virtues of character advocated by the Virtues Project. With the understanding and application of these traits into everyday life, Aristotle argued that by the end of one’s life, happiness could be achieved as a summative value to the accumulated experiences within the individual’s life. This happiness consisted of knowing the content of one’s character and pursuing individualized avenues to happiness. Although happiness was measured at the end of one’s life, the fortitude and diligence to maintain one’s moral character contributed to a sustainable happiness throughout the course of a lifetime. This happiness depended on being actively virtuous in all aspects and areas of life.

The virtue and happiness created by living a life of virtue did not only impact the self, but the village as well.

**Oceanic Circles as a Model for Community**

Gandhi used the metaphor of oceanic circles in contrast to the pyramid structure to explain how happiness and freedom of the self relates to the community and world. In Gandhi’s oceanic circle, individuals are like drops in an ocean that send out ripples and interact with each other without toppling or ruling over individuals. These individuals, in a political sense, form self-sustaining villages across a nation that promotes the well-being of individuals and the commodore to live with other villagers. “In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majestic of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units” (Parel 182). The pyramid, in contrast, is the more common metaphor for society with one or a small group of individuals occupying an apex position, ruling over, oppressing, and relying on the vast
majority of people to support and maintain a certain perceived level of status and enjoyment in life.

**Instruction of Virtues to Promote Sustainable Happiness**

Building an oceanic circle classroom community allows all students to be represented equally and all voices to carry equal importance. With the pyramid model being the most common Western social, political and economic structure, students will certainly need background information about the concept of Gandhi’s oceanic circles and the idea of a community of equals. The idea of seeing individuals as equals instead of a hierarchical structure in society may require a lot of education about the value and variety of character in each human being. While people do not always treat each other with love and respect, learning about the character and attributes that individuals have can help students see their classmates as a community. To build classroom efficacy and promote the oceanic circles model, I will use the 52 virtues suggested by Linda Kavelin Popov in “The Virtues Project” to center discussions around the rule over self and the role of a member in a community. As students learn and apply concepts of “cooperation, diligence, honesty, respect, and tolerance” (Popov) the value and importance of each individual as a part of the community will naturally be a product of understanding these concepts. Research suggests that people who consider themselves “happy” are not the most wealthy or privileged, but are individuals who “value family, friends, community and meaningful work” (O’Brien 8). In promoting the oceanic circles model and teaching character traits that help foster nonviolent, caring individuals, happiness will be a goal and by-product all together.

Often words that describe the character of an individual are not understood by students. Calling a person “reliable” may have no impact if student are unaware of the meaning and implications of the word. However, these words can be used and the corresponding traits understood, identified and practiced to help build up well-rounded individuals. Often many of these types of concepts arise as a part of working and living in community throughout a school year in the classroom. I argue that by explicitly naming, instructing, practicing and looking for applications of these traits student will be able to recognize their inter-connectedness and the oceanic circle model of community. Through instruction about the 52 virtues, students will follow a path toward control over the self, working for freedom for all, and embracing nonviolence as a way of life.

**Bibliography:**


Teaching Activities
To promote the concept of sustainable happiness, integrating the different character virtues into the classroom environment can act as a springboard to help reframe and orient students toward a different model for happiness.

The traits listed by The Virtues Project encompass a number of avenues, but once you begin consider opening up the possibility for students to add or suggest new ideas for the list of traits. They are as follows: assertiveness, caring, cleanliness, commitment, compassion, confidence, consideration, cooperation, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, determination, diligence, enthusiasm, excellence, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honor, humility, idealism, integrity, joyfulness, justice, kindness, love, loyalty, moderation, modesty, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, perseverance, purposefulness, reliability, respect, responsibility, self-discipline, service, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, understanding, and unity.

Year-Long Integration Overview
Students will be able to learn best if these words and ideas become a part of the classroom dialogue and vocabulary on a daily basis. Create some kind of word bank, bulletin board, or other visual reminder of these words and any associated definitions, images, or ideas that help students remember the word and its meaning. Throughout the year during literature discussions, discussion of current or historical events, and dialogue about classroom events or situations, incorporate these words and ideas. This will serve as a model for building community through common vocabulary and common ideas in the classroom.

Integration Strategies
• Connect these virtues with any school-wide behavior strategies so you can connect the themes with the school goals
• Pick a virtue of the week and have students add their name on a poster of that virtue each time they are “caught” using that virtue
• Pick 5-10 virtues and have students determine if characters in a fictional text are acting in a certain way
• Have students use sticky-notes and add ideas about “how-to” act in a certain way. Add these to the display of the virtues
• Integrate art, music, and physical education and have students determine traits and virtues of their times in non-academic classes
• Use a goal-setting format to encourage students to reflect and strive to reach a new level

Classroom Lesson - Determination
Purpose: To introduce and clarify the concept of determination
Begin by reading a poem, book, or biography that exemplifies the trait, courage. For example, reading the picture book, “Wilma Unlimited” about Olympic athlete Wilma Rudolph who overcame crippling childhood illnesses and with hard work and determination was able to walk and then run as an Olympic athlete.
Have students respond to the text with an oral or written response of how the text shows determination. Then have them share another example from personal experience or another known fictional or historical example to build depth of knowledge about the topic.
Keep a running track where students can record personal, observed, or read about examples of the character trait in the classroom. Consider allowing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate and share their idea of the virtues through word maps, collages, drawn images, digital storytelling, music or dance.

The Virtues Project, Inc. has written numerous lessons that assist with the instruction of the virtue in a classroom model. I would recommend investigating this resource as a potential guide for implementing this content into the classroom.

Materials Needed
List of 52 Virtues: The Gifts of Character
Writing journal
Optional: Art supplies, collage pictures, digital storytelling