Title: Courage and (Non)violence

Lesson By: Henry Seton

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 9-12
Class Size: 20 (plus/minus)
Time/Duration of Lesson: 60-90min

Guiding Questions:
- In the context of anti-colonial struggles like South Africa, what takes more courage—nonviolent or violent resistance?
- Is nonviolence merely the “weapon of the weak” as some have alleged?
- What do Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr have to say about this debate?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson explores a moral dilemma that was at the heart of the anti-apartheid struggle in 20th century South Africa: what requires more courage—violent or nonviolent resistance? The essay delves into the writings of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr to explore the often unpopular argument that nonviolent means require the greater degree of bravery.

Lesson Content:
In the first half of the 20th century, anti-colonial leaders in Africa and Asia constantly debated how to respond to the daily injustices that they faced. In the nation of South Africa, factions quickly developed around the proper means of resisting the apartheid government. In the early 20th century, the African National Congress (ANC), with its commitment to nonviolent, multiracial methods, rapidly gained adherents. However, its rise led to frequent sparring with other groups such as the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), a more militant, blacks-only political party. (Apartheid Museum Website, 2009)

A key debate of this time was what constituted the most courageous means for resisting the apartheid government. Many more militant leaders argued that violence was the only valiant response to their injustices, that only the brave had the resolve to take up arms, that nonviolent ideology signified cowardice in the face of the oppressor.

Violent methods inevitably require a certain degree of courage. Any violent act opens the perpetrator up to the possibility of violent retaliation by the victim or associates of the victim. Furthermore, certain violent deeds, such as those of the kamikaze bomber of World War II or the suicide-bombing jihadist of the 21st century, bring certain death for their perpetrators. And for the oppressed person, any act of resistance, whether violent or not, requires a particular degree of courage in that one must develop the nerve to recognize and strive for one’s full humanity. Thus, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued in relation to anti-colonial struggles that “the rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity” (Sartre, 2009).

This content essay, however, wishes to explore the contention that nonviolent action actually requires a greater level of courage than violent action. Mohandas Gandhi, in his seminal 1909 work, *Hind Swaraj* (or Indian Self-Rule), has argued that it is a myth that nonviolence is merely the “weapon of the weak”. Gandhi, who himself developed much of his
methodology while fighting for the right of Indians in apartheid South Africa, argued that adherence to the nonviolent philosophy is in fact “matchless”, that nonviolence in fact requires the highest level of heroism (Parel, 1997, 93)

Firstly, nonviolence action requires courage because of its inherent vulnerability. With such an act, one commits oneself to defenselessness in the face of one’s adversary; the nonviolent adherent essentially chooses to hand control over her/his life to the opponent. In contrast, the believer in violence clings to the real or imagined tool of control in this scenario, her/his weapon for inflicting harm. As Gandhi has asked, “Who is the true warrior—he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others?” The nonviolent soldier must be willing to flirt with death—or at least significant bodily suffering. Many a nonviolent soldier has literally been asked to confront one’s definite demise at the barrel of the enemy’s gun, “with a smiling face to approach a canon and be blown to pieces” (Parel, 1997, 93). Walking into battle empty-handed, the nonviolent warrior demonstrates absolute fearlessness.

Gandhi even went so far to suggest that the nonviolent devotee requires even more courage than a suicide bomber. Since the life of the satyagrahi, or truth-force warrior, inherently involves suffering, the inevitable departure from worldly existence involved in a suicide attack amounts to an escape from such suffering. For Gandhi, simply to live and survive in our savagely unjust world requires a degree of tenacity and courage. In the words of South African activist and poet Dennis Brutus, merely “to endure can be a kind of fight, / preserve some value, assert some faith / and even have a kind of worth” (Karim, 2006, 275).

Furthermore, the nonviolent soldier demonstrates courage in her/his commitment to look beyond the “easier” means of nonviolence and innovatively construct nonviolent methods for each particular context. In the words of King, nonviolent adherents have to be “creative extremists”, individuals with the courage to envision substitutes for the repetitive patterns of violence and equally dangerous silences of inaction (Carson, 1998, 198). Nonviolent warriors require the audacity to imagine the alternative responses of which their brothers and sisters oft dare not dream.

Often the nonviolent adherent must also have the courage to face the derision of fellow oppressed who are not even able to understand the adherent’s departure from the dominant culture of violence in the first place. Like the many parents described in Geoffrey Canada’s Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America, many people—if not the majority of people—persist in viewing violence as the only tool with which to “save face” when confronted with an unjust attack (Canada, 1995). To such people, nonviolence remains the cowardly choice, and thus the nonviolent warrior must maintain the courage to face this added level of stigma from her/his own potential allies.

Finally, the advocate of nonviolence demonstrates perhaps the greatest level of courage in that s/he often relies on an audacious faith that there is a degree of goodness in the opponent that s/he has yet to see. Often, the nonviolent soldier is called to engage an adversary in whom s/he has only seen the worst, depraved side of their humanness. As King has argued, nonviolence embodies the “courageous confrontation” of the evil within the opponent, in the daring hope that the “power of love” embedded in the nonviolent act can bring to the surface the opponent’s previously invisible goodness (Carson, 1998, 130). It is indeed an audacious hope in something yet unseen. And whether or not the nonviolent adherent believes in an actual, well-established world faith, the adherent must have the courage to trust in a truth that is too large ever to be empirically proven, one akin to King’s faith that “the arc of the universe is
long” and “bends towards freedom” (Carson, 1998, 286). A brief parable from Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* captures this point discerningly: “A man with a stick suddenly came face to face with a lion and instinctively raised his weapon in self-defense. The man saw that he had only prated about fearlessness when there was none in him. That moment he dropped the stick and found himself free from all fear” (Parel, 1997, 99). Truly, at times, it appears that the adversary is as likely to give up his/her violent and oppressive ways as the carnivorous lion is to give up its prey. However, the nonviolent devotee maintains the courageous optimism in the seemingly impossible, that her/his lion will overcome his hunger for violence and instead demonstrate a capacity for genuine compassion.

**Massachusetts State Content Standards:**
- WHII.44 Explain the reasons for the fall of apartheid in South Africa, including the influence and ideas of Nelson Mandela.

**Materials Needed:**
- Digital projector + Speakers
- Courage of (Non)violence Digital Story
- *Hind Swaraj* excerpts
- Socratic seminar documents

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**
- **Free-Association Brainstorm:**
  - Have students brainstorm what words come to mind when they hear the word “violence”.
  - Repeat with the word “nonviolence”.
  - Discuss patterns that students see in these associated words.
- **Watch and react to the “Courage and (Non)violence” digital story**
  - Share reactions / questions to images in the digital story
- **Socratic or Harkness Discussion Seminar**
  - Have a 30-minute student-led Socratic seminar or Harkness seminar on the following two questions.
    - Why did Gandhi believe that nonviolence required greater courage than violence?
    - Do you agree with Gandhi? Why or why not?
  - See attachment for additional information
- **Moral Dilemma**
  - Have your students write a letter to a friend or family member who is in a difficult situation and is considering a violent response. Students give advice on how to respond in the letter. Students could be required to quote from the Gandhi excerpts in their letter at least 1-3 times.
- **Gandhi in South Africa**
  - If you are eager to learn more about how Gandhi’s nonviolent ideology came to be during his time in South Africa, recommended further reading is his book *Satyagraha in South Africa.*
Bibliography:


*(Supplementary lesson documents on the following pages)*
Passive resistance, that is, soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How, then, can it be considered only a weapon of the weak? Physical-force men are strangers to the courage that is requisite in a passive resister. Do you believe that a coward can ever disobey a law that he dislikes? Extremists are considered to be advocates of brute force. Why do they, then, talk about obeying laws? I do not blame them. They can say nothing else. When they succeed in driving out the English and they themselves become governors, they will want you and me to obey their laws. And that is a fitting thing for their constitution. But a passive resister will say he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon.

What do you think? Wherein is courage required--in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon, or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior--he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister.

This however, I will admit: that even a man weak in body is capable of offering this resistance. One man can offer it just as well as millions. Both men and women can indulge in it. It does not require the training of an army: it needs no jujitsu. Control over the mind is alone necessary, and when that is attained, man is free like the king of the forest and his very glance withers the enemy.

Passive resistance is an all-sided sword, it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood it produces far-reaching results. It never rusts and cannot be stolen. Competition between passive resisters does not exhaust. The sword of passive resistance does not require a scabbard. It is strange indeed that you should consider such a weapon to be a weapon merely of the weak.

Passive resistance cannot proceed a step without fearlessness. Those alone can follow the path of passive resistance who are free from fear, whether as to their possessions, false honor, their relatives, the government, bodily injuries or death.

These observances are not to be abandoned in the belief that they are difficult. Nature has implanted in the human breast ability to cope with any difficulty or suffering that may come to man unprovoked. These qualities are worth having, even for those who do not wish to serve the country. Let there be no mistake, as those who want to train themselves in the use of arms are also obliged to have these qualities more or less. Everybody does not become a warrior for the wish. A would-be warrior will have to observe chastity and to be satisfied with poverty as his lot. A warrior without fearlessness cannot be conceived of. It may be thought that he would not need to be exactly truthful, but that quality follows real fearlessness. When a man abandons truth he does so owing to fear in some shape or form. The above four attributes, then, need not frighten anyone. It may be as well here to note that a physical-force man has to have many other useless qualities which a passive resister never needs. And you will find that whatever extra effort a swordsman needs is due to lack of fearlessness. If he is an embodiment of the latter, the sword will drop from his hand that very moment. He does not need its support. One who is free from hatred requires no sword. A man with stick suddenly came face to face with a lion and instinctively raised his weapon in self-defense. The man saw that he had only prated about fearlessness when there was none in him. That moment he dropped the stick and found himself free from all fear.
SOCRATIC SEMINARS 101

- A medium-intensity assessment that can be done every 1-2 weeks involving discussion of a “big” question relevant to student’s lives/unit question using a small but challenging text (usually no longer than a page).
  - Individual grades based on student self-assessment with potential faculty “correction”. Usually 1 faculty judge who is largely silent during discussion (although occasionally intervening) and gives group feedback at the end. Minor preparation but rigorous discussion norms. Roughly 30 min in length. See example assignment and assessment sheets.
  - practice making arguments and responding to counter-arguments, etc
- **Beforehand**
  - Students read and annotate text for homework. (Can also respond to focus questions as well in writing.)
  - At the start of class (or after the DoNow, etc), students receive graded assessment sheets from previous Socratic + receive assessment sheet for the present one
  - Teacher reads through text once
  - Students read through text a second time out loud
  - Students have an opportunity to ask for word definitions (if teacher wants to do this).
- **During**
  - Faculty takes notes on clipboard, tracks discussion using discussion map, and occasionally jumps into “hot seat” to intervene in the discussion.
- **Afterward**
  - Students fill out self-assessment rubric (which faculty later adjusts if deemed necessary).
  - Students share a discussion strength + a focus area.
  - Teacher gives group feedback.
HARKNESS SEMINARS 101

- Another medium-intensity assessment that can be done multiple times per week. Involves greater student ownership. Simplified/expedited means of assessment compared to Socratic/Teacherless formats.

- **Beforehand**
  - Text is chosen by the teacher. This can be a shorter text (like with the Socratic) or a longer text such as a chapter of a reading assigned for HW.
  - Students are given questions or the class generates discussion questions together based on previous night’s journaling.
  - Teacher/class sets number of minutes for discussion.
  - Teacher assigns students roles.
    - Mapper: Maps the discussion and keeps track of how much each student participates.
    - Statistician: Keeps track of data such as participation by gender, # of times DRT is used, # of questions, # of connections, etc.
    - Historian: Types up as much factual data (rather than opinions) on the laptop as possible during the course of the discussion. Can track general topics or try to track each individual contribution.
  - Teacher may give students a few extra minutes to prepare. Especially if discussion questions are decided by the class just before the discussion starts, students may appreciate this time to find some extra DRT, particularly if discussing a longer piece of text. If the text for discussion is short, the class may choose to read the whole text aloud once or twice together and define key terms before the discussion.

- **During**
  - All students without roles are expected to participate in the discussion. Students with roles may participate if they so choose, but their focus should be the collection of their data. Students also may take notes on the discussion as they see fit.
  - Teacher tracks data via attached table and occasionally joins discussion in order to push students to read more deeply, to move class to the next topic, etc.

- **After**
  - Students without roles finish filling in note-taking worksheet. Students with roles finish compiling data.
  - Teacher asks mapper, statistician, and historian to share data/general observations with the class.
  - Teacher may call on additional students to share observations on the discussion. Teacher may share his/her own observations of the discussion.
  - Teacher can assign points to students afterwards. If time permits, teacher can have students publicly score themselves (and then challenge students’ self-assessments if so desired) in the manner of ProPoints.

- **Scoring**
  - Each discussion is usually counted as about a half of a quiz grade, but this can be adjusted depending on the frequency of these assessments, etc.
  - Scores start out of a maximum of 10 points
  - Students start with 6 points
- Add 0-4 points for their contributions to the discussion
  - 0-2 points for SRT/connections
  - 2-4 points for DRT/questions
- Add/subtract half-points and/or full points for posture, airtime, interruptions, transitions, eloquence, etc.
- Scoring is to the nearest half-point.

**Final thoughts**
- Probably a good assessment for later in the year after students have already internalized the basic discussion norms. Otherwise, Socratics are probably more effective at promoting reflection on specific behavioral norms.
- Can take up a lot of time. Usually at least 30-40 minutes but can take up as much as 50-60 minutes if you want to allow extended time for discussion and reflection on the activity.
- However, a great way to work on reading skills and discussion skills while giving students increasing ownership.
- Students can find this activity challenging and occasionally boring, but as they hone their skills the discussions can be quite engaging and students are often quite proud at the end of a significant discussion.
**Socratic Rubric**

1. **Respect the Seminar (20 pts total)**
   - One person at a time
   - Maintain good posture
   - Watch your airtime
   - 20 pts

2. **Listen Well (20 pts total)**
   - Track speakers
   - Follow along in text for DRT
   - Use names & build on others’ comments
   - 20 pts

3. **Speak Well (20 pts total)**
   - Loud, clear, & confident
   - Not too fast, not too slow
   - Prepared and precise comments
   - 20 pts

4. **Contribute to the Topic (40 pts total)**
   - Use DRT, SRT, and/or PET as evidence
   - Connect evidence back to the topic
   - Ask questions to stimulate discussion
   - 40 pts

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**Grand Total (100 pts total)**

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**Explain the grade that you have given yourself (3+CS):**

________________________________________________________________________________________

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One area in which I did well: ________________________________________________________________

One area in which I want to improve: ________________________________________________________
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<th>Something I Heard...</th>
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**My Final Thoughts on the Seminar Questions (3+CS):**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**How I Think the Seminar Went Overall (3+CS):**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Circle the person who started the discussion. Double-circle the person who had the last word.
Write final observations on the back...
Final Observations (feel free to use initials of discussion members):

1. What was the approximate average number of times that each person spoke?

2. Which individuals spoke the most? How many times did they speak?

3. Which individuals spoke the least? How many times did they speak?

4. What patterns do you see as a result of your discussion mapping?

5. Any additional observations as an observer of this discussion?
STATISTICIAN DATA SHEET:
Title/Topic of Discussion: ____________________________________________

Gender Breakdown (# of times males/females make a significant statement)

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Total (males): | Total (females):

Grand Total (all):

Direct References to Text (# of times DRT is used)

Questions (# of times a question is asked other than the original discussion questions)

Connections (# of times people make a connection between the text and another text or between the text and something from their personal experience)

Interruptions (without apologizing)

Body Language (sitting up, tracking speakers, fidgeting, hands in front of mouth while speaking, etc) ***[Write the initials of the person and their specific actions]***

Miscellaneous Observations
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>SRT</th>
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