Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

The Art of Community and Compromise

Lesson By: Rocky Smith Jr., Art Teacher, Oregon City High School, Oregon City, Oregon

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: Art/Introduction to Art; Grades 9-12

Duration of Lesson: 2-3 class periods/days

Oregon Career Related Learning Standards:
CS.TW.02 Demonstrate skills that improve team effectiveness (e.g., negotiation, compromise, consensus building, conflict management, shared decision-making and goal-setting).

CS.PS.02 Identify alternatives to solve problems.

Lesson Abstract:
Students will learn the importance of community and will learn skills to create a better classroom community. Students will take part in several activities, including the “Thumb War Activity”, that will develop theirs skills in critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution and working together to build relationships.

Guiding Questions:
What can we learn from Gandhi and Chavez on how to make a safe community for all in the classroom?

How can we work together as a class to resolve conflicts and to create a sense of community?

Content Essay:
Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr. were community leaders but more importantly they were strong community builders. Even though these grassroots leaders used many skills to help unify their communities, one belief that was shared by all three men was that building communities was virtually impossible without first putting in the time to make strong personal relationships. All three of these leaders focused an extensive amount of time and effort on building relationships that were ultimately successful in unifying the masses.

Gandhi’s concept of “Bread Labor” showed that he understood that community building was not something that was to be rushed. Gandhi discovered through experimentation that learning comes from practice and that it was important to focus mainly on the process, believing in his heart that the means will justify the end.

Gandhi knew that in order to relate to people you had to put in the time to get to know them, to become one with them and that could only be accomplished after people became one with themselves. Gandhi believed in changing minds and in uniting people
with compassion and care, but he knew that one must have compassion and care for themselves before they can share it with others. This was one of the reasons he believed that the Indian people should be self-reliant and that India should not rely on the British or continue to be oppressed by their rule. Gandhi felt the oppression faced by the Indian people by the British was self imposed, due to the fact that they had given their own nation to the British on their own accord.

Although early in life Gandhi had been intrigued by the British way of life, even wearing their clothes, he slowly became more and more critical of the western ideology and was becoming concerned about what the industrial revolution and what it could do to humanity. It seemed that amidst all the modernism the sense of personal humanism was vanishing. Gandhi saw this in his work a lawyer. Tara Sethia describes Gandhi as, “a lawyer interested less in winning cases, and more in serving justice and bringing both parties in conflict together. (51) Perhaps Gandhi was right to be so concerned with modernism, and the way in which it seemed to always have people caught up or drawn into some sort of competition or conflict. It was true that Gandhi had strong opinions on how the legal system worked and he really did not understand the expectations of lawyers or how it helped lead to the common good.

In ‘Hind Swaraj’, Gandhi states,

_They go to lawyers. The latter's duty is to side with their clients, and to find out ways and arguments in favor of the clients to which they (the clients) are often strangers. If they do not do so, they will be considered to have degraded their profession._ (Parel 57)

Gandhi believed lawyers were not focused on the right objectives, in the end, sure one side wins, but does it actually resolve anything. Furthermore it works to separate our community rather than unite it. Gandhi felt that a lawyer should resolve the conflicts between parties by reaching some sort of settlement. “Compromise of interests (not on principles) is essential to bring both parties in conflict together.” (Sethia 66)

Whether it was with the courts or in politics it seems that the intent on winning has embedded itself into our modern society just as Gandhi predicted. The materialism and greed that Gandhi feared would lead to dehumanization is actually happening in our modern world. Unfortunately our society has become based more on tearing others down rather than focusing on building relationships.

_Gandhi’s discourse on rights and duty, means and ends, ethics and politics was in the context of his critique of modern civilization and in support of his vision of an alternate civilization that leads humans to good conduct. Gandhi’s views on both the problems of modern civilization and his proposed alternative to it deserve more attention._ (Sethia 248)

Many people believe that this constant competition and the inherent need to win at all costs is a major underlying cause of the violence. It is clear that we begin to lose our humanism in the fighting. In his Exposition Park speech Cesar Chavez stated, “Most of us honor violence in one way or another, in sports if not at home. We insist on our own way, grab for security and trample on other people in the process.”
So the crucial question is, “what is wrong with our world?” The answer is the title of a great new documentary called “I Am” directed by Tom Shadyac. Tom Shadyac, a former film director, is very well known in Hollywood for his comedies. Shadyac was living the American Dream, but his life drastically changed for ever after a near death experience caused him to realize what was really important in his life. In coming out of his near death experience Shadyac refocused his life, selling his multi-million dollar homes and many of his materialistic possessions. Shadyac’s documentary deals with some of the same topics that Gandhi mentioned, focusing on what we all have in common. We are all human beings and we are all are born with this strong sense of love and compassion for other human beings, and an inherent mutual respect for all.

For the law of love to prevail over the law of force in human society, we have to cleanse our self from greed, selfishness, self-centered-ness, hate and other linked prejudices- and replace them with positive attitudes like compassion, understanding, acceptance, respect, sharing, and sacrifice. (Ingram 10)

It is for this very reason that Gandhi chose to give up his profession as a lawyer and to give up most of his material possessions and to focus on what truly mattered. Gandhi devoted his time and energy to the creation of his Ashrams, or spiritual communities, however he was clear to point out that people should not to confuse spiritualism with religion. Gandhi’s ashrams did not rely on religion but did require equal vows and commitments from those who lived in the community. Each member was expected to pull their own weight and work together for the benefit of the whole.

To get his message out, Gandhi used many forms of communication. Building relationships was crucial but with out communication those relationships were not extended outside the ashrams to the community at large. Gandhi wrote editorials constantly to newspapers and later he started two of his own newspapers. Gandhi’s experiences with the newspapers allowed him to communicate his vision on a much broader scale. In very much a non “Western approach” Gandhi believed that the newspapers should be just as self-sufficient as the people of India, and so he chose not to rely on advertising. Gandhi in fact rejected the entire concept, fearing that the Newspaper’s integrity could be compromised by those wanting to profit from it.

Cesar Chavez also believed that self reliance was key to building a strong community. In fact Chavez also rejected outside funding for his United Farm Workers Union. One could easily draw parallels between Gandhi’s form of community through his ashram and Chavez’s form of community through the United Farm Workers Union. To Chavez it was important that everyone had equal part in the union and that the sense of community was created with dignity, commitment and buy in from all members, asking for union dues from them. This strengthened the sense of community in the organization even more. It is obvious that Chavez’s understood the power that relationships had in building solidarity, and thankfully this legacy still lives on through his many members of his family.

According to the Daily Democrat in Woodland, California, (6/20/2010) Cesar Chavez’s grandson Anthony Chavez made a recent appearance at a school in Woodland, California, “imploring” students “to foster relationships with one another based on commonalities instead of rivalries.” Anthony told the students, “The
relationships you develop are important to building community.” He went on to say, “The more people you can connect with on a positive level, the more potential you have to improve your life and those of others.”

It appears that it could be possible to change it if we begin to understand our opponents, actually getting to know our enemies. Change is possible if we start to see the world through the eyes of others by building relationships based on love and truth. To Gandhi and Chavez it was just common sense that communication was more conducive to bringing two different points of view closer together than it was to tear them apart. This is the focus of Dr. Jose-Antonio Orosco’s book, *Cesar Chavez and the Common Sense of Nonviolence*.

Activists are often attracted to violence, Chavez suggests, because they believe that it will help them win their cause… What activist fail to understand, according to Chavez is that the truth about social injustice is something that can’t be silenced or ignored forever. (107)

As an activist Martin Luther King Jr. shared the same view on truth but even himself admits to not originally giving the concept of non-violence the full recognition that it deserved.

The turn you other cheek” philosophy and the “love your enemies” philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was. (Lynd 386)

**Bibliography:**


**Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:**

**Introduction to Community Building (Day 1)**
- Brief introduction to the importance of building relationships and how it is crucial to building strong communities.
- Brief Introduction to Gandhi and Chavez and how they worked to build strong communities by building relationships with people. (Teachers may even want to include Martin Luther King Jr. as well)

**Class Discussion/Sharing (Day 1)**
- Have a class discussion about what students think it takes to build a strong community.
- Ask students to share examples of how they have been able to build a sense of community through relationship building
- Teachers should be just as willing to share stories from their personal lives as well.

**Class Activity (Thumb War) (Day 2)**
- Group students into pairs.
- Ask students to (work together) to play thumb war and the goal is to see what pair can get the most wins in 5 minutes.
- Ask student to try one more time, but instead of 5 minutes shrink time down to 3 minutes.
- And one last time with only one minute.

**Class Discussion (Day 2)**
- Discuss the Activity. The hope is that the number of wins increased with less time because students should realize that they are not suppose to be trying to win as individual, but as a team. Taking turn letting each other win creates more wins in less time.

**Community Activity (Two Truths and a Lie) (Day 3)**
- Students go around the room telling the class, (or in small groups) three “facts” about themselves, making sure that on of them is not true. Student can guess which “fact” is not true and can ask questions to gain more details or background on the stories that were true.

**Class Meeting (Discussion/Reflection) (Day 3)**
- Hold a class meeting and have students brainstorm how to include the concepts that Gandhi and Chavez used as well as the ideas students shared into building a safe community in the classroom.
- The class as a whole can use this time working together to create classroom rules, expectation and or goals for the year.