Title of Lesson: Ahimsa as a Moral Force
Lesson By: Vikas Srivastava

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
• Students develop a working definition of “violence”.
• Students write written reflections based on the cause and effect, scope and depth of violence
• Students are able to explicitly define the theory of Ahimsa
• Students illustrate the application of Ahimsa by re-writing their reaction to a past violent situation based on a theoretical application Ahimsa.

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson (1 of 3) encourages students to reflect on violence in their own personal lives, reflect on their reactionary tendencies and re-write the scenario based on Ahimsa and Satyagrah techniques. At the same time, students will expand their notion of violence in the process of listening to others’ recounts of personal experiences. Last and not least, the teacher will have an opportunity to hear the students’ voice.

Lesson Content:
Ahimsa, as I understand it, refers to peace in all directions, on all levels, at all times. Ahimsa extends the principle of non-violence to our thoughts, our intentions, our actions and our lifestyle. Ahimsa, as non-violence, is non-violation of specific principles we hold to be true:

For sake of this lesson we will focus on the principle of Ahimsa as Gandhi intended – “nonviolence as a moral force”¹. An Indian philosopher (Swami Vivekananda) once said, if you can live your life with complete adherence to a single principle, that is highest religion. Ahimsa alone is broad enough to occupy us for a lifetime.

Firstly, it is highly doubtful, unfortunately, if any child of the modern world has not experienced violence, if not presently enduring violence on a daily basis. “To understand non-violence one must understand violence” – Mark Juergensmeyer². As teachers, we must not assume we know what violence means to our students or how violence manifests in the lives of our students. Therefore, this lesson is two-fold: it encourages students to define and reflect on violence in their own lives, while simultaneously exposing the violence in their lives to us as teachers. For teachers to assume, and omit or deny, violence in their students’ lives is a violence committed in and of it’s self.

Secondly, the precursor to the application of Ahimsa, or non-violence to any degree, beyond the

¹ “Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948)” by Tara Sethia; Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History (2005), Volume 2, pp.802-803
² Ahimsa K-12 Teachers’ Fellowship (2007); Guest Lecture
personal sphere necessitates personal adherence and transformation completely within the personal. Therefore, this lesson of reflection, acceptance and reconciliation is the fundamental and essential lesson of non-violence, Ahimsa and Satyagrah. In short, the violence we project outside ourselves is often a reflection (to an extent) of the violence we experience inside ourselves. Until the violence within us is resolved, we cannot hope to resolve violence beyond us.

In short, this lesson attempts to create the conditions for personal transformation. Therefore, the teacher must be ready “to go there” and have gone there, his or herself. In addition, the teacher must allow flexibility for students to process. If the end is transformation, then the means must be transformative.


CA State Content Standards:
Grades 9 Through 12:
History-Social Science Content Standards
Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills:
1. Chronological and Spatial Thinking
2. Chronological and Spatial Thinking
3. Historical Interpretation

10.10 Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

1. Understand the challenges in the regions, including their geopolitical, cultural, military, and economic significance and the international relationships in which they are involved.
2. Describe the recent history of the regions, including political divisions and systems, key leaders, religious issues, natural features, resources, and population patterns.
3. Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

Guiding Questions:
• What is violence?
• Are there different forms of violence?
• What is the result of violence?
• What is the cause of violence?
• What alternatives are there to violence?
• How is Ahimsa different from non-violence alone?

Materials Needed:
• Poster paper/ marker (to record and post group discussions)
**Lesson Context:**
This is lesson #1 of a 3-lesson unit on *Music for Social Change*. The culminating project will consist of an original composition with the intent to transform society. The culminating project hopes to capture the spirit of a personal adherence to Ahimsa with the intent to transform society through Satyagrah. This lesson attempts to build a foundation to support that goal. Students need not have any prior knowledge of Gandhi or his philosophies. In fact, it is preferable that students initially reflect upon violence before introducing the unit of study. This may used as the first lesson part of a unit which analyzes Ghandhi’s non-violent approach to conflict-resolution and social transformation. Proceeding lessons should examine: change vs. transformation, consumerism, capitalism, sustainability, socio-political spirituality and local vs. global change.

**Teaching Activities:**

### Intro: Personal reflection

**REFLECTIONS ARE TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS**

1. Students will answer the following questions, and submit their recollections by typing them and printing them out – without names.
   - a) *Have you experienced violence?*
   - b) *Write a brief recollection of the incident(s)?*
   - c) *Why do you consider this violent?*
   - d) *How did you react to this experience?*
   - e) *What is your definition of violence?*

### Group Share:

1. Collect the responses and redistribute them randomly.
2. Have students stand up and read (maybe act) the reflective answers.
3. Have students write a written reflection on each reading.

### Small group discussion and large group share out:

- a) *How are our definitions of violence similar?*
- b) *How are they different?*

### Media Lecture/ Discussion: Ahimsa & Satyagrah

1. Watch “Gandhi” at stop at examples of Ahimsa and Satyagrah; the film should not be shown for more than 2/3 of the total class any day.
2. Use the incidents of the both the “Salt March” and “Calcutta Fast” to engage the students in extended discussions about violence, Ahimsa and Satyagrah.

#### Salt March

1. Take a quick survey of “students who use salt” and how often
2. Discuss the “violence” of the British Salt Law – the far-reaching implications
3. Discuss Gandhi’s short-term strategy and long-term goal
4. Encourage students to examine means justified by ends.

**Calcutta Fast:**
1. What was the “violence” surrounding the Partition of 1947?
2. How was the incident(s) during the partition different from the incident(s) surrounding the salt fast?
3. How was Gandhi’s goal and strategy similar and/or different?

**Discussion:**
1. What was/ were Gandhi’s goal(s)?
2. Was Gandhi effective in his methods?

E. **Optional Reading:** *Mahatma Gandhi: An American Profile* by Srimati Kamala.
   a. Read p.33-57.
   b. Summarize each chapter separately.
   c. Answer Questions

F. **Independent Work:**
   a. Rewrite your original personal reflection, however, this time you will align your participation in the incident with Gandhi’s principle of Ahimsa (rough draft).
   b. Be prepared to write the meaning of Ahimsa and Satyagrah in your own words tomorrow.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
Students will be evaluated on participation in class discussions; completion of personal reflections; performance quiz on Gandhian terminology; and performance in the written recreation and transformation of a violent incident.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**
1. A “Digital Story” could be the culmination of the unit as a project which illustrates students’ ability to apply Gandhian principles to current events/issues to promotes non-violence, truth and sustainability in the present day and future. This project should focus on the deeper roots of social injustice, rather than emphasize specific surface issues.

**Bibliography:**