Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title:
Gandhi and Chavez: Milestones in Their Journeys to Nonviolence, Part 1 (Gandhi)

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
3-5 Reading, Educational Technology
The lesson can be adapted to K-2 or 6-8 by using appropriate level biographies and expectations.

Duration of Lesson:
45 min/day, 2-3 weeks

Washington State Content Standards:
Reading: 1.3.1 Understand and apply new vocabulary; 2.1.3 Apply comprehension monitoring strategies during and after reading, determine importance using theme, main ideas, and supporting details; 2.1.7 Apply comprehension monitoring strategies during and after reading, summarize grade level text
Educational Technology: 1.1.1 Generate ideas and create original works for personal and group expression using a variety of digital tools; 1.2.1 Communicate and collaborate to learn with others

Lesson Abstract:
The milestones in Gandhi’s and Chavez’s journeys to nonviolence were quite different; however both men were passionate about nonviolent conflict resolution leading to social change. After reading a biography of either Gandhi or Chavez in a book club, students collaborate to create a timeline of the book’s important events in the life of Gandhi or Chavez, develop a digital story from the information, and present to the class. Class discussions center on nonviolent conflict resolution and the applicability to the students.

Guiding Questions:
What are the milestones in Gandhi’s and Chavez’s journeys to nonviolence?
How did these milestone events influence them?
What lessons can we learn from them?

Teacher Notes:
Although Gandhi and Chavez both pursued nonviolent methods, their life journeys were very different. Neither was politically involved or in a position of authority, however their methods and conceptions of nonviolence were adopted by many. Chavez found Gandhi’s writings and ideas fascinating and they greatly influenced his work with the Farm Workers Union.

The content essays present detailed biographical sketches on each man and each part could be used as a separate lesson, rather than taught together. Part 1, this document, presents biographical information on Gandhi. Part 2 presents biographical information on Chavez. The guiding
questions and activities are identical in both documents because this is meant to be one lesson, incorporating biographies of both Gandhi and Chavez. Milestones in their lives and important concepts are shown in bold.

Content Essay: Part 1 – Gandhi

Early Years – The importance of service, truth, and religious eclecticism
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Gandhi) was born in Porbandar in western India on October 2, 1869, the youngest of four children. Gandhi’s family was considered wealthy, having a home in each of three princely states. Gandhi thought of himself as a “mediocre” student; however he completed the courses he needed, attended university, and went to law school in England.

Gandhi’s mother, Putlibai, was a strong influence on his values and later practice of fasting. Her religious character and common sense drew Gandhi to the values of truth and service. Putlibai would often send her children out to the streets to find the homeless and invite them in for a meal. This modeling of service to others made a strong impression on Gandhi.

Gandhi’s first experiences with “truth” came when he was a teenager. Gandhi’s family did not eat meat for ethical and spiritual reasons, and Gandhi let himself be persuaded by a friend to try meat. After eating the meat, he was full, had a stomach ache, and couldn’t eat the evening meal with his family. For the first time Gandhi lied to his family and said that he was not hungry. Gandhi was torn between his commitment to be truthful and his desire to eat meat. He resolved it by deciding to not eat meat while his parents were alive. Later in life, Gandhi became a vegetarian out of respect for all living things.

Gandhi’s childhood was filled with many different religious experiences. His parents were from different Hindu sects, and his father had many Muslim and Parsee friends. Through listening to their discussions, seeing his father’s respect for his friends and their differing viewpoints, and experiencing different Hindu temple services, Gandhi developed a religious eclecticism.

Young Adulthood – Recognizing values and racial discrimination
During his stay in England, Gandhi learned about and experienced positive aspects of Christianity. He adopted elements of many religions into his spiritual nature and encouraged others to put aside religious differences, find the commonalities in their beliefs, and respect each other. Gandhi’s values of truth, nonviolence, compassion, and forgiveness were reinforced through all the religions he studied.

Later in life, in Hind Swaraj, an argument for India’s home rule, Gandhi wrote, “India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. . . The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsees and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms: nor has it ever been so in India” (Parel, 2009, p. 50-51). Gandhi believed there is no one religion that is above any other; all religions can live peacefully with each other.

After returning to India from England, Gandhi experienced his first racial discrimination. While attempting to support his brother in a legal matter, Gandhi was thrown out of a meeting
with the British Political Agent, Charles Ollivant, whom he had met in friendly circumstances in
London. Gandhi was shocked and humiliated to be treated this way and demanded an apology
that he did not receive. From this point on, Gandhi vowed to be more cognizant of racial
arrogance.

South Africa – Honoring service to others and fighting for individual rights
Gandhi headed to South Africa in April 1893. It was difficult for him to leave his family, but he
planned to be in South Africa for only a year. During his first few weeks in Natal, South Africa,
Gandhi experienced two more instances of racial discrimination. On his first appearance in a
courtroom as a civilian, he was asked to remove his turban because Indians were not allowed to
wear turbans in court. He left the court rather than remove it. However, when Gandhi received
his papers to officially practice law in South Africa, he chose to remove his turban in court
because lawyers were not allowed to wear head coverings. Since he was now a licensed lawyer
in South Africa, not an observer in court, he followed the expectations for lawyers.

Gandhi’s second experience with racial discrimination in South Africa came on a train ride to
Pretoria. Gandhi was seated in the first class compartment, for which he had a ticket, when a
white man came in and demanded that he leave. “Coolies” (Indians) were not allowed in first
class. Gandhi refused, and the man returned with a policeman who threw Gandhi and his luggage
off the train.

Gandhi chose to not take these incidents personally but to address the larger issue of color
prejudice in South Africa. Gandhi became a lawyer in the High Court of Natal and moved his
family to South Africa. His purpose as a lawyer was to achieve “social justice for the Indian
community” (Sethia, 2012, p. 43). He cofounded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 and focused
on anti-Indian racial laws. During this time, service to the poor and homeless became one of
his top priorities.

When the Boer War broke out in South Africa in 1906, Gandhi organized the Indian
Ambulance Corps to attend to wounded British soldiers. Although Gandhi did not agree with
British rule, he reasoned that Indians were British subjects and as such should support the
British. He would not support the war through service with violence, but he aided the sick and
wounded. Again, service to others took top priority in his life.

While in South Africa, Gandhi organized two ashrams where people lived, worked, and
supported each other. The ashrams were self-sustaining and emphasized a simple life.
Gandhi’s work in South Africa prepared him to fight the battles of discrimination and British
rule in India. He solidified his ideas on truth and nonviolence and developed his “satyagraha”
(nonviolent resistance) philosophy for combating injustice, combining satya (truth) and graha
(force). Sethia wrote, “Gandhi regarded satyagraha as the ‘weapon of the strong.’ The two
underlying ethical concepts of satya (truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence) on which satyagraha relies
are shared values across many religions. Gandhi’s originality lay in his innovative synthesis of
the two concepts to create a powerful paradigm of revolution and social reform” (2012, p. 63).
Satyagraha became known as truth force or soul force. It was the conscious choosing to not act
violently. This action of satyagraha took more courage than the acts of physical violence.
Hind Swaraj, which Gandhi wrote in 1909, explained his views on civilization and swaraj and what he wanted for India. His view of swaraj consisted of two elements: 1) individual or spiritual swaraj involving self-discipline and self-transcendence, and 2) political swaraj, consisting of a national reconciliation of religions, castes, and classes, adopting a civic nationality rather than separate ethnic nationalities, and self-sufficiency for India. This political swaraj is what Gandhi wanted for India.

Back to India – Methods of satyagraha
In 1915, after twenty-one years, Gandhi returned to India from South Africa with the determination for Hind Swaraj, home rule. The force of truth and ahimsa (nonviolence) was his course of action. Gandhi supported acts of civil disobedience, emphasizing nonviolent methods, even though he was physically assaulted and sent to prison numerous times. Gandhi employed the fast as a means of satyagraha, fasting until injustices were addressed.

After the Amritsar Massacre in 1919, Gandhi tried a new method of nonviolence – noncooperation. He led a mass burning of foreign made (mostly British) clothing in 1920 and encouraged the Indian people to wear only that which they had made themselves. It was at this time that Gandhi began wearing a loin cloth. Spinning cloth was a daily exercise for Gandhi and he encouraged everyone to participate in some form of constructive work. Self-sufficiency was one of Gandhi’s goals for India.

The 200 mile Salt March in 1930 protested the British tax on salt and was one of Gandhi’s most powerful acts of civil disobedience. Thousands of Indians joined him on this march to the sea. The salt tax was not repealed, however Indians gained a sense of pride and confidence and the march demonstrated to the British the power of nonviolent civil disobedience.

Hindu-Muslim friction was the greatest challenge for Gandhi, who wanted Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to settle their differences and live peacefully together in one large India. Gandhi considered the division of India and Pakistan to be his greatest failure. Gandhi was assassinated during a prayer meeting on January 25, 1948 by a fundamentalist Hindu who wanted to rid India of all Muslims and thought Gandhi was standing in the way.

Gandhi’s stance on ahimsa, nonviolent conflict resolution, truth, self-sufficiency, and constructive work inspired many social justice movements. Students should be able to identify the lessons of compassion, empathy, ahimsa, nonviolent conflict resolution, and sustainability. The class discussions will center on the lessons learned, the choices Gandhi made in response to his experiences, and how these lessons can be used in the classroom.

Bibliography:


Materials Needed:
- A variety of biographies at different reading levels on Gandhi and Chavez (I would have a total of 12 – 15 books available with approximately half of the books on each man.)
- See a list of possible biographies after the teaching activities.
- Chart paper
- Markers, pencils
- Access to computers
- Digital story on Gandhi and Chavez for introduction

Teaching Activities:
1) Show students the digital story created as a brief introduction to Gandhi and Chavez. Introduce the lesson to the students.
2) Introduce vocabulary students may find in their readings (ahimsa, nonviolence, ashram, boycott, turban, Indian, etc.). You may need to meet with each group as they read to discuss vocabulary that may appear in each group’s biography.
3) Give book talks on the variety of biographies you have available. Point out the differences in reading level, text size, illustrations, etc. Form book clubs of 2 – 3 students per biography, giving them some choice. I have them list on a post it note at least 3 books they would be interested in. I collect the notes and arrange the groups with a strong reader in each group and taking into account students who work well with each other and those who have difficulties with others.
4) Assign groups and give students time to read. You can have them take turns or you can allow one person to do all the reading. A fluent reader will keep the attention of the group. Comprehension is the target, not word decoding. It may take several days for all groups to finish their book. Check in with each group as they are reading – watching their progress, answering any questions they may have, and discussing vocabulary they are unfamiliar with. Students will use comprehension monitoring strategies as they read, identifying the main ideas (milestones) in the life of either Gandhi or Chavez.
5) When finished reading, each group creates a timeline of the important events that appeared in their biography. They can take notes on a piece of paper and then make their final timeline on chart paper. This skill involves summarizing, as well as identifying main ideas.
6) Discuss the timelines of the groups that read about Gandhi, then the groups that read about Chavez. Because of the variety of texts and reading levels, some timelines may have more information than others.
7) Create one class timeline from all the Gandhi books and one class timeline from all the Chavez books. You can do this on chart paper so it is posted in the room as a visual that is always available and/or you can create the timelines electronically. These timelines identify the milestones in Gandhi’s and Chavez’s lives and will provide discussion points for their nonviolent journeys and how students can adapt these ideas/concepts to their own lives.
8) Each book club group collaborates to create a digital story, using their biography and timeline as references. They can use a movie maker program (iMovie or Windows Movie maker), or you can have them create a slide show using a PowerPoint program, a SMARTBoard program, or other technology programs that you have available. Again, students are identifying the main ideas and summarizing what they have read and incorporating new vocabulary.

9) Groups present their digital story to the class.

10) Have class discussion about the nonviolent conflict resolution that each man implemented. Discuss how their lives reflected their beliefs. Refer to lessons from their mothers’ on compassion and service, nonviolent resistance and the ways they achieved this through strikes, fasts, boycotts, etc. Ask students what lessons they learned from Gandhi and Chavez, and brainstorm ideas on implementing nonviolent conflict resolution in the classroom, at recess, or at home.

11) Assessment – Each student writes a paragraph reflecting on the life of Gandhi and/or Chavez and how the student can apply what he/she has learned in his/her own life.

**Possible Biographies:**

**Gandhi**


60 pages, ages 9-12

de Lambilly, E. (2010). *Gandhi: His life, his struggles, his words (Great spiritual figures of modern times).* NY: Enchanted Lion Books.

72 pages, ages 9-12


40 pages, ages 9-12


192 pages, ages 9-12


32 pages, picture book, ages 5-8


31 pages, ages 4-8


64 pages, ages 9-12