Lesson Abstract:
After reading Hard Times by Charles Dickens, students explore the book as satire (Dickens’ critique of Utilitarianism and the mechanization of human beings). Next, to complicate our understanding of civilization we read four chapters from Hind Swaraj, Gandhi’s seminal text on creating a peaceful, independent, and self-sufficient society.

Guiding Questions:
1. What are Gandhi’s arguments against modern, industrial civilization?
2. What alternatives does Gandhi present to modern, industrial civilization?
3. What are Gandhi and Dickens’ views on what education should and should not look like?

Content Essay:
Introduction
In my district, students are familiar with dystopian literature before they get to the 11th grade, so the concepts of satire and social commentary are not new to them. However, I have students
read “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift to review satire prior to reading *Hard Times*. What I aim to do in these lessons is to introduce students to not only Dickens’ arguments against Utilitarianism, but to compare Dickens’ critique of modern civilization with that of Gandhi’s. What’s unique in this comparison is that Dickens criticizes certain practices and philosophies while offering little in the way of clear alternatives; Gandhi, on the other hand, provides his vision for the ideal society. Together, both authors provide us with the opportunity to think about and discuss the structures in our civilization that we take for granted (for example: education, poverty, class distinctions, and industrialization).

**Utilitarianism and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times***

Charles Dickens' novel, *Hard Times*, was originally provided in a serialized format where one chapter appeared each week in a newspaper (Dickens’ co-owned) called Household Words. *Hard Times* is a satiric rejection of the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills that focus on Utilitarianism. Most dictionaries will explain that Utilitarianism is the idea that the value of a noun (person, place, thing, or idea) is in direct relation to its utility (how useful it is), and that which provides the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people should be valued regardless of the means in which it is accomplished. Dickens illustrates, through the medium of *Hard Times*, what he sees would be the result of living in a society structured around the ideals of Utilitarianism. Thomas Gradgrind, one of the principle characters in the novel raises his children without the luxury of "fancy." Louisa and Tom are not allowed to go to the circus, read fiction, pretend, imagine, or engage in any activity that is not based in fact. Louisa grows up and falls into a loveless marriage, while Tom has no morals and ethics to keep him from robbing the bank he works for and pinning the blame on a factory worker named Stephen Blackpool. Using the literary device of synecdoche, the workers in Coketown (where they live) are referred to as "hands," which is to Gradgrind and Bounderby (Louisa’s husband) their only useful parts. Overall, through the course of the story we see that the philosophy of fact destroys the lives of Louisa, Tom, Stephen, and countless others; leading to Gradgrind’s reassessment of the philosophy at the end. The novel brings into focus what happens when people deny their spiritual selves and their basic emotions and creativity. It also, illustrates the ills of modern industrialization where people are treated as machines (as numbers in a ledger) rather than human beings with basic needs and desires. It is an account which in many ways supports what Gandhi identifies is wrong with modern, industrial civilization.

**Utilitarianism and Education***

In *Hard Times*, the opening scene establishes the way in which students are taught based on the philosophy of Utilitarianism. From the very first sentence, Thomas Gradgrind, espouses the very views Dickens is criticizing. Gradgrind states, “‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them’” (1). As you can see, there is no room for myth, spirituality, creativity, or anything that can’t be scientifically substantiated. Throughout the first chapter of *HT*, we see how ridiculous this form of education is and come to understand that facts alone are insufficient in cultivating the minds of our youth. At the end of the story, it is Sissy (a girl taken in by the Gradgrind family) who is the most content and well adjusted. Sissy spent a portion of her childhood in a circus and was so used to living in a world of imagination that she was never able to fully grasp/fit into the Gradgrind’s world of strict facts. With the character of Sissy,
Dickens is illustrating that we all need a balance between fact and fancy, between our two essential natures.

**Gandhi’s Thoughts on Education**

Gandhi also struggles with education and what service it should provide the youth of a peaceful society. Gandhi reflects, "In its place it can be of use, and it has its place when we have brought our senses under subjection, and put our ethics on a firm foundation. And then, if we feel inclined to receive that education, we may make good use of it. As an ornament it is likely to sit well on us. It now follows that it is not necessary to make this education compulsory. Our ancient school system is enough. Character-building has the first place in it, and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation will last" (100). Gandhi makes the point that education in and of itself is not a bad thing, but without the proper foundation (ethics, morals, what he calls "Character-building") we end up with individuals who lack the ability to "make good use of it." For Gandhi, swaraj (self rule) starts with the individual and their ability to attain self-realization, to be self-sufficient, and be an active member of their community. Education must either be a means to those ends, or may further the knowledge of an individual once he has that base.

**Gandhi’s View of Modern Civilization**

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi explores what he sees as wrong with modern civilization and later discusses what type of civilization a free India should work towards. First, Gandhi examines what "civilization" means and he comes to the conclusion that, "people living in it make the bodily welfare the object of life" (34). Europeans seek to have better and bigger homes, elaborate clothing, single machines that can do the job of hundreds of men/women. Even war has been modernized, "Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization" (35). With all the focus on mechanization, modern societies find themselves once removed from the land and the people they're a part of. Instead of living in a community, people find all their physical needs met behind the doors of their homes, and instead of working towards the self-sufficiency of their community they can enjoy foods and clothing made/grown/harvested by nameless, faceless people in far off lands. Further detached from essential humanity are the war machines that allow soldiers to kill without seeing the people whose lives they've taken away.

Another side affect of modern civilization is the abject poverty it produces. Gandhi writes that, "Formerly, men worked in the open air only so much as they like. Now, thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires" (35). Instead of providing service to their community and earning a living that contributes to the self-sufficiency of the society in which they live, men and women toil in large scale industrial complexes whose goal is to make the owner of such operations rich. Finally, Gandhi indicates that civilization in its modern incarnation is a disease; it separates men and women from their community, promotes greed, and encourages a class system to flourish that makes a few rich at the expense of millions. Overall, the populous are not taught or encouraged to engage in moral living.
Gandhi's Idea of a True Civilization

Gandhi first points out that while other great western civilizations have come and gone, India still remains as it was thousands of years ago. This historical continuity must speak to a solid foundation from which India can build purna swaraj or total self rule. Unlike the civilization brought by the British, Indians must value civilization as, "that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty" (65). Duty is morality. Each person will work towards self realization, and the well being and self-sufficiency of their community. Instead of engaging in the, "system of life-corroding competition," people will find happiness and health through the, "proper use of our hands and feet" (66-67). I mention happiness because in ages past, Indian ancestors understood that, "A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he's poor." After all, happiness is: "largely a mental condition" (66).

The Pyramid vs. Oceanic Circles

Gandhi saw European civilization as a pyramid; the wealthy and the leaders representing the few at the top being supported (in every sense of the word) by the poor masses at the bottom. Gandhi's ideal society had no such sense of castes or distinctions of importance; instead he viewed society as a series of circles in the ocean. The flat nature of the ocean surface is a metaphor for the equality that all people enjoy, while the circles represent individuals and individual villages that are self sufficient and yet interconnected/interdependent to the whole of the nation (or some might argue humanity). Gandhi writes, "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic [...] having full powers. [...] that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without" (181-182). Such self-sufficiency prevents the villages from being dependent on an outside source, and succumbing to colonization again by those who do not value equality. Decentralization is key to Gandhi just as equality is essential to his vision. Also, religion itself has a "full and equal place" in this society; Gandhi views religion (while plural and equal among all faiths) as essential to his oceanic view because the many faiths of India represent the "roots" that make up a long and rich Indian heritage. Finally, Gandhi laid out the role of machines in such a society; that while machines can serve individuals, "there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands" (183). For Gandhi, each man and women in society must have a job that gives them the opportunity to work for the betterment of themselves and the community. Work that provides for one’s needs, health, and (Gandhi would argue) happiness must not be usurped by industrial mechanizations.

Conclusion

By exposing students to Gandhi’s criticisms of modern, industrial civilization and his vision for swaraj, they are able to further complicate their understandings of Dickens’ satire and challenge their assumptions regarding modern society and education. Dickens sees education as a balance of both fact and creativity, while Gandhi sees education creating a strong moral base and then providing the tools for each person to better themselves and their community. Also, Dickens and Gandhi both worry about mechanization in there modern societies. For Dickens, it is the mechanization of human beings to the extent that emotion and creativity are shunned and workers are viewed only in terms of their useful parts (“hands” for example). Gandhi, who is equally against certain types of mechanization, views it in terms of taking traditional jobs away
from people in favor of foreign made goods and causing people (like the “hands” in Dickens novel) to toil in subhuman conditions. Both views can make students and adults alike view the world we live in more critical terms; hopefully choosing to use their education as a tool to think and act for the betterment of our society.

**Bibliography:**


**Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:**
This series of lessons is imbedded within a larger 3 week unit on *Hard Times*. While the focus on Utilitarianism, mechanization of humans, industrialized civilizations, and education could be included anywhere in the discussion of the text, I would suggest using them towards the beginning of any in depth analysis of the book (after the students have completed the novel). That way, students have a rich foundation and a high set of expectations for the exploration of further thematic subjects such as: class critiques, feminism, motifs, symbolism, etc... Also, I’ve designed the following sequence with my AP English Literature class in mind, so I would slow down the pace of these lessons if I were to adapt it to a main stream class. Finally, the purpose of group work (as I reference it in my lesson plans) is to provide a safe place to share ideas and push each student past their zone of proximal development; however, each student is expected to do their own work.

**Day One**
1. Students read and annotate *Handout #1*, which includes background information on Utilitarianism.
2. With a partner, students discuss and write down answers to the following questions: What is Utilitarianism? How is Hard Times a critique of Utilitarianism? What are two, specific examples (with page numbers) from the book that illustrate Dickens’ criticism of Utilitarianism, and how do you know?
3. When everyone is done, conduct a whole class discussion where everyone must speak up at least once.
Alt. An alternative option is to give students these questions and have them research possible answers in the schools computer lab rather than providing a handout, but this may take more than one class period.
4. Homework: Read and annotate, *Handout #2*, which is a photocopy of Chapter VI, “Civilization,” from *Hind Swaraj* and a short biography of Gandhi’s life.

**Day Two**
1. In groups of 3-4, students take a piece of butcher paper and a marker and identify similarities between Dickens’ critique of Utilitarianism and Gandhi’s critique of civilization. Students are instructed to provide quotes with page numbers from both texts to support their comparisons.
2. Next, each group will present what they came up with and field questions from the rest of the class.
3. After everyone’s presented and all questions have been answered, students return to their groups and discuss/answer the following three questions: 1. What alternatives do you think Dickens would suggest to Utilitarianism (or other problems in the book). 2. What would Gandhi suggest as an alternative to modern, industrialized civilization? 3. What would they think of our post-modern civilization?
4. Homework: Read and annotate, Handout #3, which is a photocopy of Chapter XIII, “True Civilization,” from Hind Swaraj.

Day Three
1. Working with a partner, students share their answers to the three questions we ended with yesterday, reflect and discuss “True Civilization,” and discuss anything that they were surprised about while reading “True Civilization,” especially compared with their predictions from yesterday.
2. In a whole class discussion, each partnership discusses with the class what they reflected on with each other and answers classmates’ questions.
3. Students read and quietly annotate Handout #4, which is a photocopy of “Gandhi’s Political Vision: The Pyramid vs. the Oceanic Circle” from the supplemental writings in Hind Swaraj. (Finish as homework.)

Day Four
1. In groups of 3-4, students take a piece of butcher paper and several different colored markers and create a poster that illustrates Gandhi’s concept of “The Pyramid vs. the Oceanic Circle.” Each poster must contain clear illustrations, three quotes from the text, and clear explanations for their graphics.
2. When students are done, each group shares their poster with the class and answers any questions.
4. Homework: Read and annotate, Handout #5, which is a photocopy of Chapter XVIII, “Education,” from Hind Swaraj.

Day Five
1. With a partner, students discuss Gandhi’s view of education and answer the following questions: What is the function of education in a Utilitarian society? How do you think Dickens would structure education? What is the function of education in “Education” by Gandhi?
2. When everyone is ready, students discuss these questions as a whole class.
3. Final activity: Students have 2-4 days (depending on timing, etc…) to respond to the following prompt: In a well written, thoughtful, typed essay, compare and contrast Charles Dickens’ view of civilization (Utilitarianism in particular) with that of Gandhi. Pay close attention to how each deals with education, the problems faced by people in their respective societies, and the solutions each offer to their readers.

Note: For .pdf copies of the handouts I put together for students, feel free to e-mail me at: kati_tilley@lkstevens.wednet.edu