Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Lesson:</th>
<th>¡Viva Ahimsa! Resolving Conflicts Nonviolently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/ Duration of Lesson:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Entire School Year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guiding Questions:**
- What is ahimsa?
- How did Gandhi and Chavez use nonviolence in thought and action to resolve conflicts?
- How can students use Gandhi and Chavez as models of ahimsa to resolve conflicts and create a culture of peace?

**Common Core State Standards for Speaking and Listening (Grade 4):**

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
2. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
3. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.
4. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
5. Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion); use formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

**Lesson Abstract:**

Gandhi and Chavez will serve as models of nonviolent conflict resolution. Through an understanding of ahimsa as nonviolent thought and action, students will begin to resolve conflicts and work to create a culture of peace in the classroom and school.

**Lesson Content:**

The cultural violence students are experiencing in both direct and indirect ways within different spaces included but not limited to their neighborhood and school communities are having negative effects in the ways students are interacting and resolving conflicts. Profanity, put downs, and physical violence are becoming common methods of addressing conflict in the classroom and school. Both Gandhi and Chavez used nonviolent means aimed at achieving a peaceful and just end. Students can use Gandhi and Chavez as role models they can learn from as the students begin to understand and practice nonviolence in thought and action to resolve conflicts.
One can distinguish violence from nonviolence as unconscious and conscious, mindful actions, respectively. Gandhi employed cooperation and collaboration to resolve conflicts. Gandhi opted for negotiations and the exploration of a common ground as a “positive approach to conflict resolution” since this “thrives on transforming the roots of conflict” (T. Sethia, personal communication, July, 26, 2011). Gandhi spent a large part of his life serving as a model for desired behavior and lifestyle, empowering and transforming the masses in India. Gandhi continues this transformative work after death, inspiring individuals like Cesar Chavez and the farm workers to adopt ahimsa as a means to resolve conflicts. Gandhi emphasized the “connection between the means and the end” considering the steps an individual takes to achieve a desired result as more important than reaching the goal (Gandhi, 2009, p. 79). Gandhi said, “If I want to cross the ocean, I do so only by means of a vessel; If I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom” (Gandhi, 2009, p. 79).

As a practitioner of ahimsa, Gandhi was aware of his individual responsibility to exert soul-force over body-force in the face of conflict (T. Sethia, personal communication, July, 26, 2011). Gandhi believes in the use of love-force and soul-force as the means to achieve a positive desired outcome. To represent these ideas, Gandhi created the term satyagraha which derives from two concepts “satya (truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence)” (Sethia, 2012, pg. 63). Gandhi states, “the force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul” (Gandhi, 2009, p. 83). Gandhi considers love-force to be an innate quality people must be in touch with and practice. Soul-force is a strong weapon that can only be held by courageous human beings (Gandhi, 2009, p. 91). It can take self control to resist the use of body-force and use soul-force (Gandhi, 2009, p. 89). Gandhi’s life experiences shaped his development as a person and the ideas he implemented and practice until the end of his life.

As a young man, Gandhi moved to South Africa and for the first time in his life experienced racism. White South Africans expressed their xenophobic attitudes by beating him on several occasions. Gandhi was forced out of the first class (white only) section of a passenger train, but did not retaliate. Later, Gandhi traveled to India in order to accompany his wife and children to South Africa. Upon descending the ship, Gandhi was kicked and beaten by a group of white South Africans. He did not fight back. It was during this time that Gandhi began to develop his notion of ahimsa.

After spending many years in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India. There, he critiqued British colonialism and organized people for the independence of India. Gandhi mobilized ahimsakas throughout India to resist British colonialism and strive towards Indian independence. Upon achieving independence, the partition divided India into two countries – India and Pakistan. The reasoning lied in creating both a Hindu and a Muslim state. The partition resulted in the migration of Muslims from India to Pakistan and of Hindus from Pakistan to India. The two groups disliked each other and this led to a violent outbreak in Calcutta. Gandhi chose to fast to transform Hindus and Muslims alike, pushing them to drop their swords and replace their body-force with love-force for their fellow humans. A transformation in the hearts of the two groups ended Gandhi’s fast.

Through his self-development as a practitioner of ahimsa, Gandhi served as a model ahimsaka
people could emulate. Gandhi’s exemplary demonstration of love-force versus body-force inspired an American born Mexican descendant named Cesar Chavez to respond to the living injustices of farm workers in California. Cesar Chavez practiced ahimsa while seeking to improve the life and working conditions of farm workers. Through the use of coercion, conversion, and persuasion Chavez created intercultural coalitions in the fields, confronted growers, and resisted oppression, leading to the transformation of workers and the creation of the United Farm Workers.

Chavez exercised three strategies of nonviolent conflict resolution: coercion, conversion, and persuasion. The farm workers’ strike, boycott, and sabotage (Planes de Tortuga), were coercive tactics that challenged the growers (people in power) by withholding cooperation (J. Orosco, personal communication, August 1, 2011). Chavez exercised conversion, “a tactic designed to change the minds of authorities so that they will adopt a new point of view that embraces the values of the nonviolent organizers” (J. Orosco, personal communication, August 1, 2011). The Good Friday Letter written to E.L. Barr Jr., at the time the president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, aimed at clarifying any rumors regarding the use of violence on behalf of the farm workers (Chavez & Stavans, 2008, p. 60). Persuasion tactics were designed to alter the beliefs of the authorities, but also aimed at demonstrating nonviolent organizers have valid concerns and power. Chavez established this through the Sacramento March of 1966, where a group of 70 people began a march that 300 miles later culminated in a group of 10,000.

As learners, students can experiment with ahimsa to find alternative, nonviolent ways of resolving conflicts that counteract cultural violence in order to collectively transform it into a culture of peace. Students can begin by taking a vow of truth and zero bullying that they will uphold during the school year. Other way students will be able to employ methods of nonviolent conflict resolution will be through sit down conversations that allow students to express their thoughts and feelings. These thoughts and emotions can also be expressed by writing a letter to another student. Students will also have the opportunity to learn about themselves and how to detect incoming negative emotions that might trigger a violent reaction. To derail these potentially violent actions, students will learn methods they can exercise to counteract negative feelings such as counting to ten, breathing exercises, or finding an activity such as drawing, journaling, or exercising.

Gandhi and Chavez concentrated on creating “lasting and enduring change by fostering a culture of peace” (Gandhi, 2009, p. 44). By exercising nonviolent means, both figures designed a transformative path to lasting, positive, and peaceful change. Gandhi has served as an ever-lasting influence in the struggle for justice through nonviolent actions, creating positive change throughout the world. Influenced by Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, a Spanish speaking activist in the United States influenced the formation of the United Farm Workers through a nonviolent farm workers movement. By using the lives of Gandhi and Chavez to demonstrate the positive change that has come about through the practice of ahimsa, and by teaching students ways to use ahimsa to resolve conflicts in their daily lives, students will have the power to create a culture of peace, love, and nonviolence in their classroom, school, and community.
Teaching Activities:

- Present the digital story to introduce Gandhi and Chavez. The digital story will include pictures and a narration demonstrating their use of nonviolence to resolve conflicts.
- Have students share how they resolve conflicts. Students will orally share with the class ways they resolve conflict and determine whether those are means that promote a culture of violence or a culture of peace. Possible scenarios are:
  - **Scenario 1:** Mateo brought a special green pencil to school and left it on his desk. During math workshop, he saw Sandra using his pencil. Mateo went up to Sandra, yelled at her, grabbed the pencil and walked away.
  - **Scenario 2:** Jackie was drinking water in the playground. Pablito bumped into her trying to catch a ball and spilled water all over Jackie. Jaime saw Jackie wet, asked her what happened, and kicked Pablito in the stomach. Most of the class ostracized Pablito during lunch.

- Introduce ahimsa as the means to resolve conflicts. Students can role play scenarios with a solution to resolve conflicts nonviolently and promote a culture of peace. Possible solutions for scenarios 1 and 2:
  - **Scenario 1:** Mateo can talk to Sandra and explain to her that is his special green pencil. Mateo can approach this situation with a positive mindset, without assuming she was stealing from him.
  - **Scenario 2:** Pablito can apologize to Jackie and explain it was an accident. Pablito could have realized that caring about her classmate and helping her out is more important than continuing playing with friends. Moreover, Jaime could have asked Pablito what happened without assuming/jumping to conclusions.

Materials:

- Projector
- Computer
- Digital story
- Chart paper
- Markers

Bibliography:

