**Title of Lesson:**
The Roots of Ahimsa

**Lesson By:**
Stephanie Young

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<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Time/ Duration of Lesson:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 2/3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3 days, 45 minutes/lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Language Arts and</td>
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**Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:**

1. Students will be able to identify similarities between the methods of nonviolence used by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Cesar Chavez as demonstrated through their theme timeline.
2. Students will be able to determine the roots of Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez’s methods of nonviolence as shown through discussion.
3. Students will be able to identify, compare and contrast the methods of nonviolence employed by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez with those in the book *Si, Se Puede/Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strikes in L.A.* by Diana Cohn as shown through class discussion and journal writing.

**Lesson Abstract:**

In this lesson for 20 students, grades 2 and 3, students will discover the inspiration for Civil Rights leaders they have already studied (Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez). They will be introduced to Gandhi and his philosophy of ahimsa that so inspired those leaders. Students will then be able to see how ahimsa is utilized in today through a nonfiction picture book.

**Lesson Content:**

Mahatma Gandhi is an inspirational figure for many throughout the world today. While he is perhaps best known for his nonviolent leadership in the process of Indian independence from Britain, he has contributed much else to our world today. The idea of ahimsa (or nonviolence in thought and action) is arguably his most influential contribution to our world today and often seen in the form of civil disobedience in our society today. Gandhi believed that only through ahimsa could we attain truth (the ultimate goal). He used this idea to work for equality for Indians in South Africa and later for Indian independence from Britain.

Ahimsa, Gandhi believed, comes in the form of nonviolent thought and action. Gandhi believed in the inherent good in each individual and this, along with his desire to attain truth (Gandhi once said “Truth is God”), led to ahimsa in thought. His actions of ahimsa were the result of much contemplation, reading and dialogue with individuals he regarded highly (including authors Tolstoy and Ruskin). One memorable teaching about ahimsa is that no act can be coercive during the practice of ahimsa as coercion is a type of violence. Despite the many actions of civil disobedience he took, Gandhi always examined closely the results to ensure himself that the changes made by those involved resulted from a true change of heart,
rather than coercion. The actions of ahimsa made popular by Gandhi include fasting, strikes, protests, marches and more.

The principals of ahimsa and civil disobedience are illustrated in the following examples from Gandhi’s life. In 1908 Gandhi is imprisoned for the first time in Johannesburg, South Africa. During this time Indians in South Africa were being forced to register despite the fact that they were in fact citizens of the British empire (as the British has colonized both South Africa and India). In protest to the forced registration (one of the many discriminatory laws against Indians in South Africa at that time) Gandhi led a mass burning of registration cards. Twenty-two years later, in 1930, Gandhi led the famous Salt March to protest the British salt tax. In the 240-mile march to the sea followed by the making of salt (in turn breaking British law) Gandhi and his followers displayed yet another civil disobedience tactic of mass marches. In the march that followed throughout villages Gandhi and his followers adhered to ahimsa during which they refused to even raise their arms in self-defense against the British soldiers. Another method of ahimsa Gandhi used throughout his life in an effort to make social change was fasts. In both the Calcutta Fast of 1947 and his Last Fast in 1948 Gandhi fasted in order to bring about Hindu-Muslim peace in the newly independent nation of India. During this time Gandhi’s fast led to reflection by Hindu’s and Muslim’s alike followed by a lasting end to the retaliatory violence that marked those days.

Gandhi’s definition of ahimsa is something many people strive to attain today and has been used in many struggles for equality in America similar those Gandhi once fought for. Martin Luther King Jr. studied Gandhi and his idea of ahimsa throughout his short life. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote,

“Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale... It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking” (Stride Towards Freedom, pg. 97).

In his quest for an end to segregation during the 1950’s and 1960’s Civil Rights Movement Martin Luther King Jr. adhered to ahimsa in action. The Civil Rights Movement is marked by major acts of civil disobedience such as sit-ins, protests, strikes, marches and more.

Formal and legal segregation in America ended with the famous 1954 ruling by the Supreme Court in Brown v. the Board of Education Topeka. Yet in the years following this ruling segregation still existed. In 1955 Rosa Parks employed ahimsa as she famously refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person in Montgomery, AL. Followed by a year of strikes the buses were desegregated in 1956. Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington in 1963 when Dr. King made his famous “I have a dream” speech. Sit-ins occurred all over the South during this time and in 1964 President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that ended legal racial discrimination in all forms.

These acts of civil disobedience, and the enforcement of Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka in the 20 years after the ruling, are strikingly similar to the ones Gandhi used in his lifetime as he worked for equality in various forums.
Cesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers Movement in the 1970’s, was similarly inspired by his predecessors in ahimsa, namely Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., as he looked for a way to improve the working conditions of Latino farm workers in the United States, in particular in California. In 1965 Cesar Chavez led a march to Sacramento, CA from Delano, CA in an attempt to get wage increases for California grape pickers and draw attention to the farm workers plight. This, plus a 5 year strike against California grown grapes by consumers (that Chavez encouraged), led to much improved conditions for farmers in California. During 1965 and 20 years later to protest pesticide use Cesar Chavez fasted as he adhered to the principle of ahimsa. Like those before him Cesar Chavez utilized nonviolent forms of civil disobedience, in particular strikes and protests.

Years after Gandhi’s first use of ahimsa it is still regularly being used today. Ahimsa, while practiced and written about long before Gandhi’s life, was brought to the forefront of the world’s mind by him as they watched his life of ahimsa and the many goals he attained through this practice. As the world witnessed ahimsa’s success in bringing about equality and rights for Gandhi’s people, many were, and are today, inspired. Civil rights leaders in 20th century America certainly utilized his philosophy of ahimsa as we have seen and there is no doubt that it will continue to inspire people in their work for equality in all arenas of the world in the upcoming century.

**California State Content Standards:**

**Grade 2**

*English Language Arts*

- 2.4 Ask clarifying questions about essential textual elements of exposition (e.g., *why*, *what if*, *how*).
- 2.5 Restate facts and details in the text to clarify and organize ideas.
- 2.6 Recognize cause-and-effect relationships in a text.
- 3.1 Compare and contrast plots, settings, and characters presented by different authors.

*Social Studies*

- 2.1 Students differentiate between things that happened long ago and things that happened yesterday.
- 2.5 Students understand the importance of individual action and character and explain how heroes from long ago and the recent past have made a difference in others' lives.

**Grade 3**

*English Language Arts*

- 2.2 Ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal information found in, and inferred from, the text.
- 2.6 Extract appropriate and significant information from the text, including problems and solutions.
- 3.4 Determine the underlying theme or author's message in fiction and nonfiction text.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Why do you think Gandhi and ahimsa inspired Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and Cesar Chavez?
• Why do people continue to choose to use ahimsa today to make changes?
• What are the common issues you see between Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa
  Park and Cesar Chavez’s work?

Materials Needed:

• Digital story
• T-chart or Venn diagram (1 for the whole class and 1 for each pair or group)
• Blank timelines (1 for each group)
• Si, Se Puede/Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strikes in L.A. by Diana Cohn

Lesson Context:

Students will have already studied Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez. We
will have discussed the issues these leaders were confronting, the time period, the methods used
and the importance of these individuals today.

Some possible areas to incorporate this into your year are during the spring (in which the focus
on Martin Luther King Jr. during black history month and Cesar Chavez on Cesar Chavez day
in California are natural).

You may also choose to incorporate it at the end of year, after you have completed the in depth
study of civil rights leaders (background knowledge will be needed on Martin Luther King Jr.,
Rosa Parks and Cesar Chavez).

Teaching Activities:

Using the digital story as the anticipation set, students will see images of familiar movements
we have learned about (the civil rights movement, farm worker’s movement) and the famous
faces associated with them as well as images of Gandhi and some of the movements he led.

Possible activities:

• Use background knowledge of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez to
  predict/infer what Gandhi’s causes could have been (whole class, small group, pair
discussions, guided discovery)
• Similarities and differences among famous leaders who adhered to ahimsa (T-chart,
  Venn diagram) done whole group
• Using the whole class T-chart or Venn diagram on similarities and differences among
  famous leaders who adhered to ahimsa as an example, have students make their own T-
  chart or Venn diagram on similarities and differences among famous leaders (pairs or
  small groups)

--------- Possible breaking point

• Thematic timeline of events placing Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar
  Chavez first on the timeline. Use pictures to infer where Gandhi would be on the
timeline (whole class, small group, pair, individual)
• Place important acts of civil disobedience on timeline and discuss how they are linked.
  Students should infer that Gandhi was an inspiration for the Civil Rights leaders studied
due to the placement on the timeline (whole class, small group, pair, individual).

--------- Possible breaking point
• Read-aloud of *Si, Se Puede/Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strikes in L.A.* by Diana Cohn. Discuss how the Janitor’s union utilized ahimsa. Provide specific examples of ahimsa and connection to Gandhi and Civil Rights leaders (whole class, small group or pair discussion followed by individual writing)

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**

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<td>Class discussion/informal observation</td>
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<td>Class discussion</td>
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<td>3</td>
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**Extension Activities/ Enrichment**

Students could continue to study forms of nonviolent civil disobedience in the modern world (ie protests against Iraq, the May day marches for immigration).

Students could interview their parents about forms of civil disobedience they participated in or witnessed.

Students could discuss causes they would be willing to use civil disobedience for.

**Bibliography:**


Additional Resources for Teacher Background Knowledge on Gandhi
