Title of Lesson: Ahimsa in Writers Workshop

Lesson By: Stephanie Young

Goal/ Objectives of Lesson:

1. Students will be able to summarize the key point (the idea that love or soul-force is more powerful than violence) of the selection from *Hind Swaraj*, pages 89-90 as seen below in the Lesson Content, both in oral and written form.
2. Students will be able to generate a written list of narrative ideas that show ahimsa through a moment in their own life.
3. Students will be able to write a narrative (at least 1 page) about a moment in their own life that shows ahimsa.

Lesson Abstract:

In this language arts lesson 20 students, grades 2 and 3, will use Gandhi’s writing in *Hind Swaraj* to further their understanding of ahimsa (nonviolence). Using the writing workshop model, students will generate a list of events from their own life that illustrate ahimsa and develop one of these into a narrative.

Lesson Content:

Throughout his life Gandhi worked for many causes, from the rights of mill workers in South Africa to Indian independence from Britain. The common thread in all these cases was his underlying and outwardly expressed belief in the concept of ahimsa, or nonviolence. Gandhi believed that only through ahimsa, in both thought and action, could true change occur, as it had to happen from within. He led many acts of civil disobedience, thereby adhering to ahimsa, after much personal contemplation, which included fasting, protests, strikes, marches and more.

One essential idea behind Gandhi’s work for social change (through ahimsa) is the underlying belief in the importance of satyagraha, “insistence on the truth.” For social change to occur or for conflicts to be resolved all parties must move toward the truth, a common truth. Coercion is a type of violence, and therefore not acceptable in your journey to the truth. And compromise is not satyagraha either, as both sides give something up rather than move towards a common truth that is held by both parties in the conflict. In order to achieve satyagraha one must engage in ahimsa, creativity and reflection all the while holding onto the basic tenet of love as a powerful force.

Gandhi himself perhaps best explains satyagraha as he writes,

“Truth [satya] implies love and firmness [agraha] and therefore serves as a synonym
for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement satyagraha, that is to say, the force which is born of truth and love of nonviolence” (Satyagraha in South Africa, pg. 72).

This belief in love as an all-powerful force is also referred to by Gandhi as soul-force. Gandhi believed that all individuals possessed the capability to do good and strongly adhered to the idea “love the sinner, not the sin.” This idea of soul-force as the underlying reason passive resistance, satyagraha and ahimsa are so powerful is explained simply with Gandhi’s own words, “The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul” (Hind Swaraj, pg. 85).

This statement that “The force if arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul” (Hind Swaraj, pg. 85) is an incredibly powerful and somewhat bold statement. How can one claim that regardless of the size of the army, the power of the machinery and the size of the system, the force of love administered through ahimsa is more powerful? And indeed in the 78 years he lived, Gandhi had discussions with many prominent individuals about the effectiveness of ahimsa as a means for social change, the power of soul-force over all else. Some believed that only violence could bring about the necessary social change, others that violence was appropriate at times while ahimsa effective at other times. Regardless of who the discussion was with, Gandhi held firm to his belief in the effectiveness of ahimsa and wrote about his reason for strong beliefs in ahimsa in the Hind Swaraj.

The following passage, from the Hind Swaraj, demonstrates Gandhi’s reasons for his belief in soul-force and ahimsa and will be used in the lesson:

“The fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love. Therefore, the greatest and most unimpeachable evidence of the success of this force is to be found in the fact that, in spite of the wars of the world, it still lives on. Thousands, indeed tens of thousands, depend on their existence on a very active working of this force. Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of this force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not, and cannot, take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. Two brothers quarrel; one of them repents and re-awakens the love that was lying dormant in him; the two again begin to live in peace; nobody takes note of this. But, if the two brothers, through intervention of solicitors or some other reason, take up arms or go to law – which is another form of the exhibition of brute force – their doings would be immediately noticed in the press, they would be the talk of their neighbours, and would probably go down to history. And what is true of families and communities is true of nations. There is no reason to believe that there is one law for families and another for nations. History, then, is a record of an interruptions of the course of nature. Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history.” (pages 89-90).

In this passage Gandhi argues the simplicity that love and ahimsa is a much greater force and
tool for social change than war and violence, as the human population itself is the proof.
Because there is still a human population today, Gandhi argues, it must be true that despite all
the wars and violence ahimsa is a greater and more powerful force. Conflicts arise often, and
although not written about, those solved through ahimsa on a daily basis, in all contexts, be it
family, community or nation, result in conflicts resolved without death. These conflicts are
instead solved in the spirit of ahimsa and love and this results “in the fact that in spite of the
wars of the world, it still lives on” (Hind Swaraj, pg. 89).

Gandhi argues on a regular basis, in conflict after conflict, in family after family, community
after community, and ultimately nation after nation, are solved through the force of love, truth
and ahimsa. These conflicts do not make history, as history is “a record of every interruption
of the even working of the force of love or of the soul” (Hind Swaraj, pg. 90). That is to say
that history records the moments in which violence and war are the force rather than the
moments in which love, truth and ahimsa are the force.

We can extrapolate the idea that on a daily basis we are witnesses to soul-force, to ahimsa,
truth and love in situations where conflict arise. We may see them unfold with our loved ones,
family and friends. We may witness them in our classrooms or our communities, and perhaps
even as a nation. It is these moments, moments that happen daily, that we must recognize and
cherish as proof of the power of soul-force. It is these precious moments we witness on so
many levels that show the true power of ahimsa and love.

California State Content Standards:

Grade 2

English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension
- 2.3 Use knowledge of the author's purpose(s) to comprehend informational text.
- 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.

Writing
- 2.1 Write brief narratives based on their experiences: Move through a logical sequence
  of events. Describe the setting, characters, objects, and events in detail.

Grade 3

English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension
- 2.2 Ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal
  information found in, and inferred from, the text.
- 2.3 Demonstrate comprehension by identifying answers in the text.
- 2.4 Recall major points in the text and make and modify predictions about forthcoming
  information.
- 2.5 Distinguish the main idea and supporting details in expository text.
Writing

- 2.1 Write narratives: Provide a context within which an action takes place. Include well-chosen details to develop the plot. Provide insight into why the selected incident is memorable.

Guiding Questions:

- Why did Gandhi feel that ahimsa was surely the way to make progress in our world? What was his “proof”?
- When do we see ahimsa in our own life?

Materials Needed:

- Copy of text pages 89-90 (from *Hind Swaraj*, as found in lesson content) for self and all students – modify as appropriate for your students (shorten, pick and choose sentences to use…)
- Writing notebooks
- Chart paper
- Draft paper for writing
- Journals

Lesson Context:

Students will need to be familiar with the writing workshop model and will need to have a prior understanding of ahimsa. This lesson is meant to further their understanding of ahimsa through the writer’s workshop model.

This may be appropriate for the end of the year after students have a grasp of the concept of ahimsa.

You may choose to teach this lesson during a narrative unit of writer’s workshop (writing about a moment in your life).

This lesson is also appropriate to use to help further the idea of ahimsa while focusing on character development (during a problem solving focus for example).

Teaching Activities:

Students will be using a writer’s workshop model for this lesson. There are many different models of writer’s workshop that are commonly used. For my lesson I will be using the writing workshop model used in “Every Child a Reader & Writer” by the Noyce Foundation.

The model includes a daily lesson that consists of a 5-7 minute mini-lesson followed by independent writing (the time when conferencing would also occur) and ending with a 5 minute teaching share in which the teaching point of the day is reinforced.

The process this model takes students through is immersion, collecting, choosing a topic, gathering around a topic, drafting, revising, editing, publishing, celebrating and reflecting. This lesson will take you through drafting only.
• Introduce *Hind Swaraj* text; may be modified to make appropriate for grade level (whole class, questioning the author followed by small group or individual activity such as journals).
• Discussion of where we see ahimsa in conflict resolution on a daily basis (whole class, small group, think-pair-share).

----- **Possible breaking point**
• Mini-lesson on generating ideas of ahimsa in your own life (graphic organizer, modeling).
• Independent time to generate ideas in writing notebook (may begin with pairs or small group sharing to give students further ideas).

----- **Possible breaking point**
• Mini-lesson on choosing an idea and developing into a narrative “moment from your life” (direct teaching, modeling).
• Independent time to draft ahimsa narrative.

### Assessment/ Evaluation:

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### Extension Activities/ Enrichment

Take the draft into a published narrative.

Create a class book of ahimsa narratives.

Ask parents to contribute ahimsa narratives from their own lives.

### Bibliography:

Noyce Foundation, “Every Child a Reader & Writer.”


*Additional Resources for Teacher Background Knowledge on Gandhi and Problem Solving*

