Title of Lesson: Gandhi’s Ashrams and School Sustainability

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<tr>
<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
<th>Class Size: 20</th>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Grade Social Studies/Science</td>
<td>Time/Duration of Lesson: Multiple sessions, multiple days.</td>
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**Guiding Questions:**

Before the Lesson:
- How do you help others?

After the Lesson:
- How did Gandhi care for himself and others?
- How did Gandhi care for the earth?
- What is an Ashram?
- Why do you think Gandhi helped create Ashrams in India?
- How can we care for ourselves, others, and the earth?

**Lesson Abstract:**

Teachers will learn about Gandhi’s ashrams. Ashrams were community farms that were self-sufficient. Gandhi and his family frequently lived on these farms. The community members of the ashrams grew their own food and prepared it, made their own cloth, cleaned the ashram, and lived a simple life. Teachers can relate the information to students by discussing school gardens, where food comes from, what happens to trash, and preparing and eating food together.

**Lesson Content:**

In ancient India, ashrams were religious retreats for monks to remove themselves from the world and contemplate their lives. Gandhi’s ashrams were places of retreat from modern conveniences, yet still very socially connected to the world. Weekly newspapers were distributed across India, and news spread around by word of mouth as well as from visitors to the ashram. Gandhi strived to live by example, and his ashrams were a model of self-sustainability (Fischer 54). Gandhi encouraged all people to become more self-sustainable because he believed that was the path to swaraj, or home rule. Gandhi wrote in 1942 that his ideal village would be, “a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many wants in which dependence is a necessity” (Fischer 87). Villages would be self-governing and self-sufficient, growing their own crops, making their own clothing, have their own schools, and trade with other local self-sufficient villages.

Around 1903, while riding a train, a man lent Gandhi the book “Unto This Last” by John Ruskin, an English writer. Gandhi stayed up all night finishing the book, and said, “That book marked the turning point in my life” (Fischer 30). The teachings he took from the book were:
1. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. All have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. The life of labor is the life worth living (Gandhi 265)

Gandhi bought a hundred acre farm near Phoenix, Natal. The office of his weekly newspaper, Indian Opinion, was now transferred to Phoenix Farm. Everyone living there helped to print the paper, care for, harvest and cook the food, and clean the premises. Everyone who participated earned the same living wage. The houses on the farm were small and simple, made with corrugated iron. Gandhi himself slept out in the open on a thin cloth at Phoenix Farm during the brief periods he stayed there (Gandhi 266-270).

In 1909 in Lawly, South Africa, Gandhi bought 1100 acres of land and created another communal farm. He called it Tolstoy Farm. He described it as a, “sort of co-operative commonwealth where civil resisters would be trained to live a new simple life in harmony with one another” (Fischer 41). Gandhi lived on this farm with his family. Together, members from the farm created a self-sufficient community. They prepared bread and made marmalade from oranges grown on the farm. They grew and prepared food, made furniture, sandals, and clothing. At times, over 100 people lived at Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi and other adults taught the children religion, geography, history, math and reading (Fischer 42).

In 1915, Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Ashram in Ahmedabad. Between 25 and 230 people resided at this ashram with him at different times. People lived in simple huts and provided for themselves and the group. Gandhi stated in his autobiography, “All had their meals in a common kitchen and strove to live as one family” (Gandhi 355). Gandhi further broke down the social norms of the Indian caste system by welcoming untouchables into his ashram family. Nonviolence was practiced in the ashram. The ashram community even refused to kill venomous snakes that resided there as well. During a strike of the mill-hands of Ahmedabad on low wages, the principal activity of the ashram was weaving (Gandhi 387).

Gandhi continued to spread the word of Indian self-rule by traveling to towns donating spinning wheels, and training and educating people on how to weave their own cloth. His slogan was, “a miniature mill in every home” (Fischer 85). An interviewer in 1934 asked Gandhi, “you are opposed to machinery only because and when it concentrates production and distribution in the hands of the few?” Gandhi answered, “you are right, I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me. That is all” (Fischer 85). Gandhi felt that in order to have home rule of India, the people must become less dependent on outside imports and the British.

Gandhi’s way of caring for the others and self-sustainability can be encouraged in the lives of young students by teaching about care for the earth. Children can learn about where food and trash comes from and recycling. They can plant school gardens, and then harvest and cook their own food. Students can compost food scraps, and brainstorm ways to reduce their waste. Students can explore the nature surrounding their school and schoolyard and discuss respect for living things. Children can teach others about what they have discovered by sharing their learning.

Materials Needed:
- School Gardens, vegetable seeds
- Vegetables to prepare a simple meal such as carrot or vegetable soup
- Broth for the soup
- A crock pot or burner and pot to make soup
- Small composter for in the classroom (optional: red worms)
- Recycling bins
- Poster paper, crayons

### Suggested Teaching Activities:

- Plant a school or community garden with your class.
- Prepare simple recipes with your class. Invite others to taste what you made.
- Make a classroom recipe book for students to take home and share.
- Compost school lunch scraps in the classroom.
- Develop a school-wide recycling program. Have students teach other grades about it.
- Have students create a food cycle poster; compost, plant, food and waste, compost.
- Have students compare how Gandhi lived and what students are doing to be kind and caring to the earth.
- Have students trace back where their food and trash comes from and where it will go.
- Create a storyboard shows the origin of food, how it traveled to the child’s plate, what becomes of the trash. Students can also record what will happen to their trash.

### Bibliography:
