Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Lesson:</th>
<th>Paradigm Shift: Gandhian Nonviolence and the Concept of Power</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson By:</td>
<td>Carol M. Lukens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade Level/ Subject Area:</td>
<td>High School/U.S. and/or World History</td>
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<td>Class Size:</td>
<td>25 students</td>
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<td>Time/ Duration of Lesson:</td>
<td>Two-three class periods</td>
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**Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:**

- Students will reflect on and define their own personal concept/definition of power.
- Students will examine the cultural and historical definitions of power commonly portrayed in text and media as violent and oppressive.
- Students will compare and contrast these cultural and historical concepts of violent power (Gandhi’s “brute force”) with Gandhi’s concept of nonviolent power (“soul-force”).
- Students will develop awareness and learn to critically analyze the ways in which our concepts of power and problem solving by violent means are culturally influenced.
- Students will review and analyze articles from Time, Newsweek and Yes! Magazine and differentiate between the portrayal of brute force and soul-force in current media sources.
- Students will research and develop nonviolent alternatives to problems on the personal, local, and/or global level using soul-force rather than brute force.

**Lesson Abstract:**

The purpose of this lesson is to demonstrate to high school history students how the concept of power has often been and remains culturally and historically portrayed as violent and oppressive, a power that Gandhi referred to as the force of arms, or brute force. Students will also learn that there is a far superior power which offers individual and societal freedom and empowerment, the power of soul-force through nonviolence. Using Gandhi’s writings, magazine and film images as well as personal reflection, students will differentiate between the concepts of brute force and soul-force, develop awareness of how we are commonly shaped to view the concept of power as violent, and learn how to begin transforming our culturally shaped concept of power by developing ideas for nonviolent alternatives to personal and societal conflicts.

**Lesson Content:**

If we truly want to attain peace in our homes, schools, communities and world, we must begin with transforming this social construct. By studying the life of Mohandas K. Gandhi, students will distinguish the ethical difference between the power to oppress, injure, and harm (which Gandhi refers to as “brute force”) and the power of love and nonviolent resistance (the power of “soul-force”) in solving conflicts.

As students, we are commonly shaped to respond to conflicts with violence. A simple review of history textbooks, mainstream news sources, and contemporary media outlets indicates how violent resolutions to conflicts, from personal to global issues, have become deeply embedded in our history and culture. Moreover, an important contributing factor in our
tendency toward violence is the way in which we socially construct the definition of power.

To illustrate this concept, an ordinary dictionary search will contain specific definitions of power in terms of force or might, such as: “possession of control, authority, or influence over others; a force of armed men; physical might; political control or influence.”\(^1\) Likewise, a simple web image search reveals illustrations of guns, battleships, military weapons, oppressive political leaders, and hate groups in addition to the practical illustration of power as a source of electricity.\(^2\) Therefore, if we truly want to attain peace in our homes, schools, communities and world, we must begin with transforming our traditional and violent social construct of power.

A fitting source for such a task is the life of Mohandas K. Gandhi. As a personal victim of racial and colonial oppression, Gandhi used inquiry, personal discipline, an interest in others, and passion for spirituality to find a way to respond other than with violence.

Born in Porbandar, India, 1869, Gandhi married at age 13, and later, after leaving family behind to obtain a law degree in England, became a legal adviser in South Africa. There, where Indians had no political rights, Gandhi witnessed racism firsthand. On a train, though holding a first-class ticket, he was thrown from his car by European railway workers. As the Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Foundation relates, “From this political awakening Gandhi was to emerge as the leader of the Indian community.”\(^3\) Most importantly, he did not respond violently. Rather, in seeking independence Gandhi offered a paradigm shift with satyagraha, or “an active pursuit of truth through love and nonviolence,”\(^4\) which he strived to model in word and deed.

In his fundamental writing, *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi explains an ethical difference between “brute-force,” the power to oppress, injure, and harm, and that of “soul-force,” the force of love or nonviolent passive resistance in solving conflicts. He does this using an argument of ends and means, for when using either, he suggests, the ends become the means.\(^5\) As an example, if we use violence to force others to comply, they are likely to rebel at some point so that we have not only harmed them, but have also disturbed our own peace. Rather than resting assured of peaceful accord, we will likely reside with fear that they may retaliate with violent means. Consequently, we have obtained an exact result (fear and violence) of the means (violence) we used.

The preferred soul-force, or passive resistance according to Gandhi, is “a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms.”\(^6\) He believed it most

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1 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/power
important to resist laws that are oppressive or unjust, but to do so in a way (such as non-cooperation) that does not inflict harm on others, only on us. For this reason he believed it takes more courage to act with nonviolence than violence.

In the above example of ends and means then, if we use nonviolence to petition others to comply, we will not be inflicting harm on them and will thus be more likely to achieve a resolution that will allow us to reside in peace rather than fear. And if we use nonviolence when others will not comply, we will be resisting oppression to ourselves and harm to them.

Frequently Gandhi modeled the power of nonviolence. Beginning with the train incident, rather than retaliating or accepting lesser accommodations, he spent the night in a cold station waiting room, reflecting and then resolving to stay in South Africa until he found a way to nonviolently challenge institutionalized racism. As Louis Fischer explains, “He remained from 1893 to 1914… during which he not only increased his moral and intellectual stature many cubits but became a successful leader and lawyer. In the end he won a great victory for freedom.”

Gandhi believed the freedom he sought would not be achieved, however, until the oppressed were willing to demand it, both in South Africa and India. Fischer denotes this vision of Gandhi’s for India with the following excerpt:

Village uplift was Gandhi’s First Freedom. Over 80 per cent of India lived in her villages, and they were poor, illiterate, diseased, discouraged. Peasant liberation from destitution could not be the achievement of the small upper class or a gift of the foreign power. The peasants had to win it. Gandhi craved for his country a psychological metamorphosis which would give it inner freedom and, then, inevitably, outer freedom, for once the people acquired individual dignity they would insist on better living and nobody would hold them in bondage.

Thus, his firmly held belief in the necessary transformation of others to attain freedom from oppression stemmed from his own experience of self-transformation.

Gandhi’s power of nonviolence, however, was perhaps most notably exhibited in the Salt March of 1930 and the subsequent Indian raid of the Dharasana Salt Works. As the British imposed increasing restrictions on the Indians in efforts to maintain imperial control, Gandhi responded by leading his people in continued, creative campaigns of nonviolent resistance.

Because his satyagraha campaign sanctioned non-cooperation with the British government,
Gandhi cleverly chose the oppressive salt tax to garner mass support in a quest for complete independence. The peasants required the most salt as they toiled and perspired in the hot sun, and the tax depleted a large percentage of their wages. After receiving no response in petitioning the British to remove the tax, Gandhi informed the government of his plan and then engaged his people in the largest-known movement of nonviolent civil resistance. On March 12, 1930 at 61 years of age, Gandhi began a march to the sea at Dandi. 24 days and 241 miles later, Gandhi openly and nonviolently broke the unjust British law which Fischer notes, “made it a punishable crime to possess salt not purchased from the government salt monopoly,” as he reached into the water and picked up a handful of salt.9

In the days following the march, as the Indians continued into the waters to illegally produce their own salt, thousands were arrested and jailed. And less than one month later, Gandhi’s people carried forth his vision for independence in a profound act of nonviolent resistance at the Dharsana Salt Works. Twenty-five hundred in all, columns of marchers approached British officers and hundreds of Indian policemen. Fischer recounts the moving words of Webb Miller, a United Press correspondent who subsequently dispatched the horrific scene to the world:

“A picked column advanced from the crowd, waded the ditches, and approached the barbed-wire stockade.’ The officers ordered them to retreat but they continued to step forward. ‘Suddenly... scores of native policemen rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis [staves]. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins... Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing with fractured skulls or broken shoulders... The survivors, without breaking ranks, silently and doggedly marched on until struck down...“ The raids and beatings continued for several days.”10

Gandhi’s vision of independence was ultimately realized. Although official independence was not attained until 1947, most important to Gandhi was the inner freedom his people acquired in 1930, for Indian refusal to acquiesce to further imperial oppression rendered the British morally powerless and the masses unconquerable. The experience of soul-force had given them hope to continue striving for complete independence.11

This is the power Gandhi wanted us to embody. As Srimati Kamala asserts, “Gandhi wanted to see us train ourselves in the realization of soul-force daily through the common actions of self-restraint, unselfishness and patience. ‘These are the flowers,’ he said, ‘which spring beneath the feet of those who accept but refuse to impose suffering.’”12

Mohandas K. Gandhi also said, “The future will depend on what we do in the present.”13 If we truly want peace for ourselves and for others, let us live his model in word and deed so as to transform that construct of violent power to one of life-giving empowerment and dignity for all.

**Wisconsin Social Studies Standards:**

- B12.2 History Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to
evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion.

- B.12.8 History Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Recall, select, and explain the significance of important people, their work, ideas in the areas of political and intellectual leadership, inventions, discoveries, and the arts, within each major area of Wisconsin, United States and world history.

- C.12.8 Political Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Locate, organize, analyze and use information from various sources to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and communicate the position.

- C.12.9 Political Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Identify and evaluate the means through which advocates influence public policy.

- C.12.14 Political Science Performance Standard – Grade 12
  Explain and analyze how different political and social movements have sought to mobilize public opinion and obtain governmental support in order to achieve their goals.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What kinds of problems does Gandhi address and why?
- How does Gandhi deal with oppression? How does he handle conflict and exploitation?
- What is his attitude toward social problems versus those who may be responsible for such problems?
- What are some historical examples from his life and movements that demonstrate the power of nonviolence?
- How does Gandhi’s concept of power differ from our historical and cultural concept of power and means of solving problems?
- How do images in media and film depict the power of soul-force as an alternative to brute force?
- How is Gandhi’s concept of power superior to brute force and personally empowering?
- How can we use Gandhi’s concept of power, that of soul-force, to empower ourselves and others personally, and to effect social change?

**Materials Needed:**
- Copies of Time, Newsweek, and Yes! Magazines
- LCD projector and computer for showing of digital story
- Posterboard
- Markers
- Glue sticks or glue

**Lesson Context:**
This lesson will fit into a larger unit of study on both historical and contemporary India, including Gandhi’s life, philosophy, action and influence in effecting personal and social
change. It may also be used for peace studies.

The digital story I created will be used to provide powerful visual and audio examples of how non-violence can be used to move from brute force to soul-force.

**Teaching Activities:**

**Prior to this lesson, students should become familiar with Gandhi’s life and experiences by reading the article entitled “Who’s Gandhi,” published by the Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Foundation, Gandhiserve Foundation, http://www.gandhiserve.org/whos_gandhi.html.

**Day one:** As a 5-10 minute anticipatory activity, after writing on the board the word “power,” ask students to respond to the following questions on a piece of notebook paper: "Think about what the word 'power' means to you. In the center of your page, write the word 'power.' Then, write other words around 'power' that relate to it, drawing lines between these words and the center word as well as drawing lines among words that are related to each other in some way." After five minutes, ask students to share their responses. What synonyms did students offer? Did students include any people or historic events? Did any of them share personal conflicts? Did any students list emotions? Did students include resolution tactics or ideas? Based on these lists, create a class definition of "power" and write it on the board. Compare your class definition to a dictionary definition (Merriam-Webster's on-line definitions include: (1) ability to act or produce an effect; (2) legal or official authority, capacity, or right; (3) possession of control, authority, or influence over others; (4) a force of armed men; (5) physical might; (6) political control or influence).

Next, before viewing the digital story, advise students that there are some strong images so that they have the option to choose not to view it, and then after viewing the story as a class (6 min. 30 sec.), use the remainder of the class period to compare and contrast the images by discussing which Gandhi would have defined as brute force and which as soul-force, how these images are commonly used in media to shape and/or define our concepts/ideas, and how students feel about these definitions compared to the class definition of power.

**Prior to the next lesson, it may be helpful to assign students the background reading in the appendix entitled “Paradigm Shift: Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Concept of Power” as it also illustrates several concrete examples of nonviolent power that Gandhi used to create social change.

**Day two:** As a follow-up lesson to Day one and after discussing the background reading, divide students into groups of four. Next assign them to use issues of Time, Newsweek, and Yes! Magazine to create posters depicting the power of soul-force as superior to brute force, and its capacity for personal and societal empowerment.

Use the last 10-15 minutes to share posters and for discussion.

**This activity may be extended another day if teacher so chooses depending on students’
interest in discussing the concepts of power and nonviolence.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
As an assessment, students will demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of power defined as both brute force and soul-force by writing a one to two-page essay explaining each, how and why they were important to Gandhi, and then providing examples of both at school, in their community and/or in the world to demonstrate ways in which soul-force can be used to empower and effect social change.

A rubric may be used for grading purposes.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment:**
- Teachers can show the film *Making of the Mahatma* or the documentary *A Force More Powerful* to provide students with a deeper understanding of Gandhi’s life and nonviolent movements.
- Students could design and participate in a service project with other students and/or family members that uses soul-force to resolve a particular conflict, concern, or social problem.

**Bibliography:**


**Mahatma Gandhi Research and Media Service.**
http://www.gandhiserve.org/whos_gandhi.html

**Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.** http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/power