

TEACHER WORKSHOP

The Art of Nonviolence: Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Concepts of Nonviolence in Indian Art

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Organized by Elizabeth Benskin, Educator for School and Teacher Programs

Audience: Teachers of Social Studies and Visual Arts between grades 7 and 12

Class Size: 15-20

Time/Duration of Lesson: 5 hours

Topic: A comparison of conceptions and uses of nonviolence by examining Jain and Buddhist artwork, the life and work of Mohandas K. Gandhi, and the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. Additionally, an exploration of ways to teach about nonviolence in the classroom.

Standards of Learning (District of Columbia):

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 7

- 7.4: Students analyze the geographic, political, religious, social and economic structures of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- 7.10: Explain the religious and cultural developments on the Indian Subcontinent during the Gangetic states and the Mauryan Dynasty.

Grade 10

- 10.12: Students analyze major developments in Asia since WWII.

Grade 11

- 11.11: Students analyze the origins, goals, key events, and accomplishments of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

Grade 12

- 12.2: Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a federal system; civil disobedience and the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; and the relationship of religion and government.

VISUAL ARTS*

High School Proficient, High School Advanced

Strand 1: Perceive and respond to works of art, objects in nature, events, and the environment.

Grade 7, High School Proficient, High School Advanced

Strand 3: Understand the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of the visual arts noting how human diversity is revealed in visual arts and artists.

Grade 7, High School Proficient, High School Advanced

Strand 5: Connect and apply what is learned in the visual art forms and subject areas and to careers.

*Visual arts learning standards for the District of Columbia are currently in draft form and have not yet been officially adopted. Once they have been adopted, more specific standards can be applied to the workshop rather than the general strands.

Objectives:

- Teachers will understand why nonviolence was used in the Civil Rights movement through the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and cite specific examples of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and supporters of Civil Rights used nonviolence.
- Teachers will understand Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and be able to cite specific examples of how Gandhi used nonviolence.
- Teachers will be able to articulate concepts of nonviolence in Buddhism and Jainism.
- Teachers will be able to explain how images of the Buddha and a Jina relate to the religious contexts from which they emerged.
- Teachers will compare and contrast these different conceptions and uses of nonviolence.
- Teachers will discuss how these examples of nonviolence apply to their schools and communities today.
- Teachers will develop one classroom activity that relates art and nonviolence in the classroom.

Lesson Content:

Nonviolent social movements of the 20th century, including those led by Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States, have continually posed the question of how nonviolence can be a positive force for change in society. But for many Americans, the idea of nonviolence still remains unclear or is understood only on a superficial level. In this workshop, teachers will explore nonviolence in the Buddhist tradition, the Jain tradition, the work of Gandhi, and the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. in context. The content will be approached from what is likely to be the most familiar to educators (Martin Luther King, Jr.) to what is likely to be least familiar (Jain artwork), thereby allowing them to enter into the content using their own knowledge base and experience.

The goal of the workshop is to empower teachers with information on different conceptions of and approaches to nonviolence to compare and contrast. Through this examination, they will be

able to consider not only what supports the DC Public School social studies and visual arts standards, but also how they might apply concepts of nonviolence in their classrooms in other parts of the curriculum or as part of classroom management or conflict resolution frameworks.

The workshop will begin with an exploration of the role of nonviolence in the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. during the American Civil Rights movement. In an effort to fight the institutionalized discrimination against African-Americans in the United States in the mid-20th century, the participants in the civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. adopted nonviolent strategies. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights activists, such as James Lawson, were inspired by the nonviolent social activism created and implemented by Gandhi in India in the first half of the 20th century that challenged British rule and sought to bring an end to the growing hostilities between Hindus and Muslims.

Similar to Gandhi's approach, Martin Luther King, Jr. insisted on respecting the humanity and dignity of those who actively or passively participated in the oppression of African-Americans. His goal was to love and respect his opponent rather than attempt to hurt or embarrass him. In addition, King supported the use of theatrical approaches to demonstrate the injustices endured by African-Americans. This is evidenced in the 1963 campaign to end racial segregation in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. In early 1963, a boycott against Birmingham businesses was initiated. In April of that year, an injunction against protests was passed and it was under this injunction that King was arrested and jailed. In early May, protests were held by members of the African-American community in Birmingham where they were attacked with pressure hoses, police dogs, and excessive force used by police. Press coverage of the event horrified the nation, and in doing so, fulfilled one of the goals of such a nonviolent campaign—to demonstrate the dramatic suffering that the protesters were willing to endure to secure their rights.

Gandhi is credited with leading India to independence from the British in 1947. However, Gandhi's concept of nonviolence or ahimsa, extended well beyond his efforts to galvanize the Indian people in their quest for freedom from the British Raj. Gandhi's wrestling with the concept and application of nonviolence had its origins in the struggle to secure rights for Asians in South Africa. His experiments with nonviolence preceded his involvement in the Indian independence movement.

In Gandhi's view, nonviolence was not simply refusing to resort to violence in the face of attack or provocation. Nonviolence, or ahimsa, was rather a state of self-regulation for the individual that insisted upon nonviolence in thought, speech, and action. Gandhi defined violence as not simply physical violence, but also as hatred, anger, poverty, etc. He firmly believed that the means to achieve an outcome were as important as the ends, thus a violent approach, even if it led to a successful result, was an unacceptable approach. The process of living and acting upon nonviolence was a goal in and of itself. The integrity of the person enacting nonviolence for a specific goal was then preserved as much as that of the person's "opponent" in a conflict. As Mark Juergensmeyer states, Gandhi considered *himsa* or violence "to describe anything that violates—in a physical, mental, or emotional way—the integrity of something living." (Juergensmeyer, p. 27)

Gandhi also considered nonviolence active rather than passive. To him, nonviolence was evidenced in the search for truth and the attempt to enact that truth in the world. This was accompanied by his constant reflection on his vision and actions to refine and improve them; ultimately to align them as closely to truth as possible. Gandhi called the forcefulness of nonviolence wielded to achieve a truthful result *satyagraha*.

A profound example of Gandhi's use of nonviolence was the 1930 Salt March. To protest unfair and prohibitively expensive taxes on Indian salt, he first sent a letter to the Viceroy, asking that the salt tax be revoked. This was a typical approach in keeping with the spirit of nonviolence that did not seek to surprise the opponent or put him on the defensive. Rather, attempting to communicate openly and honestly was always Gandhi's first step. When he received no response from the Viceroy, he organized a march to the sea to collect salt in protest of the tax law.

As King would later understand, Gandhi used dramatic effects to educate the oppressors. In this case, a month-long march to the sea in which thousands of people joined attracted the attention of the entire country. Gandhi was soon arrested along with many others. When there was no change in the Viceroy's position, it was decided to march on the Dharsana Salt Works near Bombay. Volunteers were brutally beaten, but had vowed not to retaliate, illustrating Gandhi's emphasis on the demonstration of self-suffering in the face of injustice. This kind of demonstration King and Civil Rights activists used to good effect in Birmingham, Alabama more than 30 years later. The Salt March marked a shift in the power balance between Britain and India. As the poet Rabindranath Tagore stated, "Europe has completely lost her former moral prestige in Asia." (Fischer, p. 102)

Upon entering the galleries, there will be an exploration of the concept of nonviolence in Buddhism and the role of compassion in Buddhism. This will be explored through an image of the four stages of the Buddha's life: his birth, enlightenment, teaching, and death. This stone frieze was made in Gandhara (a region in present-day Pakistan/Afghanistan) in the late 2nd-early 3rd century C.E. as decoration (and teaching tool) on a stupa or Buddhist shrine. Gandhara was a region with multiple cultural influences—including India, West Asia, and the Greco-Roman world. As a result, the frieze portrays Buddhist concepts and iconography, but also conforms to ideals of Greco-Roman beauty (evidenced, for example, in the flowing hair and robes of the figures.)

Emerging in response to pre-existing religious (Vedic) beliefs in India, Buddhism (which began around the 6th century B.C.E.) pre-supposed the transmigration of the soul (rebirth). The Buddha is credited with coming to the realization that life is suffering, and the way to end suffering is to resist attachment and desires and to stop the endless cycle of death and rebirth. The goal of Buddhist practice is nirvana or "extinction"—a complete release from the suffering caused by the attachment to the world of the senses. This understanding of the nature of life and suffering is encompassed in the Four Noble Truths: 1) Life is suffering, 2) The cause of suffering is desire and attachment, 3) There is a way to cease this suffering by renouncing desire, and 4) The way to stop suffering and to attain enlightenment is to follow the Eightfold Path. Included in the Eightfold Path are:

Right Understanding—Understand the Four Noble Truths and the purpose of the Eightfold Path.

Right Aims—Treat others with respect and compassion.
Right Speech—Speak the truth and to commit oneself to clear communication.
Right Action—Do good in the world. Do not kill, steal, or harm other beings.
Proper Work—Embark on work that does not harm other beings.
Right Thinking—Think in a way that is positive and nonviolent.
Proper Awareness—Stay in tune with one’s thoughts and actions.
Meditation—Focus the mind to create inner peace.

The components of the Eightfold Path bear many similarities to what would later be Gandhi’s holistic conception of nonviolence in thought, speech, and action.

Concepts of nonviolence and compassion are depicted on the frieze panels. The scene of the Buddha’s enlightenment is particularly telling as he meditates without allowing the demon Mara and his armies to distract him from his purpose or provoke him into giving up his meditation, in which he will understand how to alleviate the suffering of all beings. In the panel that depicts his death or *paranirvana* (his passage into nirvana) he appears lying on his side, while followers dramatically demonstrate their despair over his death. Only one lone person—a seated figure in meditation—has a peaceful countenance as he contemplates the positive fact of the Buddha’s *paranirvana*, rather than regretting the world’s loss of the Buddha in human form.

Finally, teachers will examine a bronze Jain altarpiece made in 1333 in Western India, commissioned by the merchant Muladeva. This piece creatively uses negative space to depict a Jina in the moment when he dies and reaches enlightenment or *moksha* (similar to nirvana in Buddhism)—here he is depicted as an absence of space. As in Buddhist tradition, Jainism holds that there is rebirth and the accumulation of karma (the effects of actions both good and bad on the cycle of rebirth). Jina literally means, “one who conquers” and in Jain tradition, Jinas are spiritual leaders who are believed to have attained enlightenment by conquering anger, greed, ego, and deceit (known in Jainism as the “Four Inner Enemies.”)

This particular artwork depicts the Mahavira, the 24th Jina in a religious cycle according to the temporal cycles of Jainism. Jainism emerged in India around the same time as Buddhism (6th century B.C.E.) and the Mahavira—a contemporary of the Buddha—is depicted in his moment of release or *moksha* by showing only his absence.

Ahimsa or nonviolence is at the heart of Jain belief and practice so there is a greater emphasis on renunciation than in Buddhism to avoid any possibility of harming life. Serious self-sacrifice is required in Jain belief for a person to attain *moksha*. Upon entering service as a Jain monk or nun, a person must take the Five Mahavratas or “Great Vows”: Ahimsa (nonviolence), Truth, Non-stealing, Celibacy, and Aparigraha (non-possession). In fact, this type of altarpiece was made only by the Jains of the Sky-Clad (unclothed) tradition whose monks renounce all possessions, including garments.

Like Gandhi’s later interpretation of ahimsa, followers of Jainism believe that one must control one’s inner impulses toward violence while living simply to avoid harming life. Interestingly, Gandhi regarded his close Jain friend, Srimad Rajchand, as an important spiritual mentor.

Lesson Content Bibliography

Fischer, Louis. *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*. New York: Mentor, 1982.

Forsgren, Krista, et al. *The Art of Buddhism: A Teacher's Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Gandhi's Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005.

King Encyclopedia. www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/nonviolence.htm

Sethia, Tara, ed. *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism*. Delhi, India: Motilal Barnarsidass Publishers, 2004.

Guiding Questions:

What does nonviolence mean to you?

What was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of nonviolence? How did he use it in the American Civil Rights movement?

What was Gandhi's concept of nonviolence? How did he use nonviolence?

What was the Buddhist concept of nonviolence? How is that illustrated through the Gandharan frieze of the life of the Buddha?

What is the Jain concept of nonviolence? How is that illustrated through the Jain altarpiece?

How are these concepts and uses of nonviolence similar and how are they different?

What is the role of compassion/love in nonviolence?

What are other ways that nonviolence can be expressed through art?

Materials Needed:

Card Stock Paper

Pencils

Colored Pencils

Magazines

Colored Paper

Tempera Paint

Glue

Forsgren, Krista, et al. *The Art of Buddhism: A Teacher's Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Gandhi's Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005.

Lesson Context:

Offered as professional development for 7th-12th grade social studies and visual arts teachers in January or February to either precede or coincide with Black History Month.

Teaching Activities:

1. Welcome & Introduction to Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
2. Overview of Workshop
3. Introductions: Why did you choose this workshop?
4. Brainstorm: What does nonviolence mean to you? Personal reflection then group brainstorm.
5. Lectures/Moderated Discussion: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi—conceptions and uses of nonviolence.
6. Gallery Discussions: “Life of the Buddha” and “Siddhapratima Yantra (Shrine of a Perfected Being)”.
7. Reflection and Discussion: Compare/Contrast different conceptions of nonviolence. Pair work in reflection followed by group discussion.
8. Art Activity: What does nonviolence look like to you? Depiction of one scene that represents a concept of nonviolence. Representing nonviolence through a variety of media (drawing, painting, collage or multi-media).
9. Classroom activity: Development of one classroom activity.
10. Introduction to Ahimsa Center Resources.
11. Wrap-up and Evaluation.

Assessment/Evaluation:

Discussion—Are teachings responding with appropriate questions? Are teachers actively participating in the discussions?

Art Activity—Did teachers participate in the art activity? Did they make an effort to depict nonviolence in different media? Were they able to articulate the artistic choices they made in depicting nonviolence?

Evaluation Responses—Did teachers come away with understandable and clear information on the topic of nonviolence? Can teachers articulate one thing that they feel they can incorporate in their classroom?

Resources:

Ahimsa Center in Thought and Action. www.csupomona.edu/ahimsacenter

Fischer, Louis. *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*. New York: Mentor, 1982.

Forsgren, Krista, et al. *The Art of Buddhism: A Teacher's Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000.

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. www.asia.si.edu

Gandhi, Mohandas K. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

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The King Center. www.thekingcenter.org

King Encyclopedia. www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/nonviolence.htm

Pal, Pratapaditya. *The Peaceful Liberators: Jain Art from India*. Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1994.

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