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<th>Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute</th>
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<td><strong>Title of Lesson:</strong> SATYAGRAHA: THE SOUL FORCE OF NONVIOLENCE</td>
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<td><strong>Lesson By:</strong> Eve Creary</td>
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<td><strong>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</strong> 3-5th Grade Social Studies/Humanities</td>
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**Guiding Questions:**
- What is satyagraha? What does satyagraha “look” like?
- Who are some of the leaders of nonviolence, past and present?
- What characteristics do the leaders and other participants of nonviolence have to possess in order to conduct campaigns/movements of satyagraha? What are the identifiable features of nonviolent activism?
- Is satyagraha and nonviolent activism a viable tool for future conflict resolution and correcting social injustice?

**Lesson Abstract:**
The intent of this lesson is to imbue students with a better understanding of nonviolence from a historical and practical level. Students will identify, define, and discuss satyagraha, the driving force which enables social reform and provides remedy to injustice. (Comparable English terminology such as “soul force”, “truth force” or “soul power” may be utilized for ease of comprehension). Students will learn that before mass movements of social change can occur, the internal reformation and preparation of the individual is prerequisite to develop the character and will necessary when confronting violence both on personal and sociological levels.

**Lesson Content:**
Every year, in the United States, around mid-January, educators and students alike bring out books and posters of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and pay reverent tribute to his leadership and contributions to the “Civil Rights Movement”. Media outlets air the “I Have A Dream” newsreel, and surviving participants of the marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and legislation efforts reminisce on the collective conscience and palpable energy that unified and motivated African Americans, “Negroes who had been freed from fear.” (Carson, p.88) Many of the lessons and activities are extended into February, Black History Month. As educators, we hope the examples of nonviolence will miraculously take hold, students will resolve conflicts peacefully, and justice will prevail over the land. Yet, just the opposite is happening - incidents of conflict are increasing, bullying is reaching epidemic levels, violence has become an acceptable form of entertainment, and the old lex talionis, law of retribution (a.k.a., Hammurabi’s code), an eye for an eye, is the well practiced response. Dr. King, the marches and protests for dignity and freedom, the Equal Rights Act of 1964 and the effectiveness of nonviolent protest are reduced to a nice story.

The reasons these “best of intention” lessons have little staying power or impact are many. First, they lack the necessary depth of understanding that comes via careful examination of the history of nonviolent protest in effecting social change. The lineage of successful nonviolent protest is often overlooked in the classroom, as if the practices employed by the likes of King, Cesar Chavez, and more recently, Leymah Gwobee of Liberia, are uniquely attributable to the leaders of his or her respective fight for justice.
A search for the starting point of organized nonviolence as a force for social reform, therefore, will inevitably point to the satyagraha campaigns of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Communing lessons of nonviolence have to include an examination of what we mean by the term “nonviolence” itself and identifying characteristics of nonviolence that are (or should be) consistent when employing nonviolence as the antidote to social injustice. We need to develop and understanding of satyagraha in Gandhi’s time and how it was and is employed in subsequent actions.

Gandhi’s program of nonviolence, which started in South Africa to alleviate political, economic, and social oppression of the Indian community, was uniquely Gandhi’s. Drawing from the creed of ahimsa (nonviolence) and satya (truth/love) Gandhi recognized the force (graha) necessary to confront injustice. Although Gandhi himself initially used the term “passive resistance” to describe this force needed to resist or counter violence, he was very clear that it was very different than the passivity he observed used in England during the fledgling suffragette movement. Gandhi describes the force he advocated and used as the kind of force as “‘If you do not concede our demand, we will be no longer your petitioners. You can govern us only as long as we remain the governed; we shall no longer have any dealings with you.’...This force is indestructible. He who uses it perfectly understands his position...The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or soul.” (Parel, p. 85) Thus the term, satyagraha (soul force).

The success of satyagraha, as a force for social reform can only occur if the participants in a mass action protest are a) true satyagrahis, i.e., they have internalized the principles of nonviolence on an individual level first and b) are prepared, practiced, and trained. Only through direct individual experience of soul force can a wider movement of nonviolence occur. Just as importantly, Gandhi saw the need to train just as those going to battle need to train. “Let there be no mistake as those who want to train themselves in the use of arms are also obliged to have these qualities more or less. Everybody does not become a warrior for the wish.” (Parel, p. 98)

In an analysis of Gandhi and satyagraha, Raghavan Iyer expressed Gandhi’s concern with the quality of satyagraha: “If a single individual could become an exemplary satyagrahi, subtle changes would ultimately result and be more far-reaching than massive demonstrations based on impetuous enthusiasm and latent violence...failure is the fault, not of satyagraha, which is invincible, but of an impure motive or an inauthentic application.” (Iyer, p.2)

King’s interest in satyagraha was sparked by a sermon from Dr. Mordecai Johnson in 1950. Prior to this, King still believed in the idea of justifiable violence, i.e., that war “could serve as a negative good in the sense of preventing the spread and growth of an evil force.” (Carson, p. 23) He struggled with the application of his own Christian beliefs and ethics as a useful tool in effecting social change on a large scale by limiting the ethical philosophies of loving one’s enemy and turning the other cheek to only individual conflicts. King describes his transformation as a believer of nonviolence when he wrote, “Gandhi was 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. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I
discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking.” (Carson, p. 24) King attributed the use of satyagraha to the success of his marches and sit-ins.

And what are the qualities the satyagrahi must have? Nonviolence participants “have to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow the truth, and cultivate fearlessness.” (Parel, p. 96) Among these qualities, fearlessness is paramount as it affords the participant the absolute moral courage and freedom requisite in facing the most dangerous evil without bloodshed and more permanent results.

King also recognized the need for individual fearlessness when he wrote,

“...along the way of life an individual must stand up and be counted and be willing to face the consequences whatever they are. And if he is filled with fear he cannot do it...when a person lives with the fears of consequences for his personal life he can never do anything in terms of lifting the whole of humanity and solving many of the social problems which we confront in every age and every generation.” (Carson, p. 88)

Accordingly, courageous people practiced nonviolence as a way of life. King’s other principles of nonviolence also echo those of Gandhi: “Nonviolence seeks reconciliation, not defeat of an adversary; Nonviolent action is directed at eliminating evil, not destroying an evil-doer; a willingness to accept suffering for the cause, if necessary, but never to inflict it; a rejection of hatred, animosity or violence of the spirit, as well as refusal to commit physical violence; faith that justice will prevail.” (http://www.thekingcenter.org, as of 7/19/09)

Only when the individual has internalized the basic precepts of nonviolence can a broader satyagraha movement be initiated. But the larger nonviolent movement is not a spontaneous outpouring of pent up frustration and emotion. The nonviolent movement or resistance also follows preconditions and preparation before being implemented. Iyer notes, “Though all human beings could learn satyagraha, its actual exercise in domestic and public arena was, Gandhi knew, strictly limited by the adequate preparation and training of aspiring satyagrahis. To involve masses of individual in fiery ordeals for which they are not prepared internally is only to tempt them to violence or duragraha, and thus to betray the cause of truth.” (Iyer, p. 3) In other words, a satyagraha movement must be pure of motive and conducted without coercion.

Because authentic nonviolent action comes from “a natural response to widespread moral distress” (Iyer, p. 4) and could involve public defiance of statutory laws, Gandhi determined that civil disobedience only be utilized after lengthy preparation (the individual must be prepared to suffer the consequences of the action) and as a last resort. Direct action was only to be undertaken in a nonviolent way to create awareness of the injustice and bring the opposition to the negotiating table. The ability to withstand the oppressor’s violent response to nonviolent protest is thus a demonstration of the selflessness of love in action. While the satyagrahi does not wish harm upon himself, the ability to withstand this violence and not judge the perpetrator of the violence is to know “that oppressor and oppressed alike are victims of an unjust system” (Iyer, p.3). Negotiation was always preferred before direct action.

The Gandhian steps to preparing for a satyagraha campaign are echoed by Dr. King. “We made
it clear that we would not send anyone out to demonstrate who had not convinced himself and us that he could accept and endure violence without retaliating.”. (Carson, p. 178) In his famous Letter From Birmingham Jail, King outlined four basic steps in a nonviolent campaign: “collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; purification; and direct action.” (Carson, p. 189) Within the letter, King also identifies education and reconciliation as integral to nonviolence.

In outlining his vision for a long-term sustainable nonviolent community, Gandhi noted, “only a society based on some minimal degree of awakened individual conscience can sustain itself for long.” (Iyer, p. 5) Lessons of nonviolence must be sure to inform students that satyagraha is available to everyone and it is the ultimate agent of change.

Does satyagraha work? When Gandhi considered the need for proof of the efficacy of satyagraha he offered the following, “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 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.” (Parel, p. 89) With a better understanding of the history of nonviolence, the power of satyagraha, and the identification of basic principles and practices of nonviolence, students may begin to truly celebrate the work of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez and today’s leaders who use nonviolence as the best response to individual and societal conflicts.

For more information on
Satyagraha and Gandhi: http://www.gandhiinstitute.net/home.html
Martin Luther King Jr.: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/
César Chavez.: http://www.chavezfoundation.org
Leymah Gbowee: http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/7352_leymah_gbowee.cfm

State Content Standards:
New York State Social Studies
Standard 2: World History Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

Materials Needed:
• Digital DVD Story “Soul Power”
• Brain Pop Movies of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez & The Civil Rights Movement @ www.Brainpop.com (website is subscription; however they do have a free 2 week trial period)
• Graphic Organizers (KWL, Compare/Contrast)
• Materials to create visual, graphic timeline
• Magazine/Newspaper Articles of Contemporary Examples of Nonviolence
• For older elementary students, DVD – “Pray The Devil Back To Hell”(see website for description and how to obtain a copy http://www:praythedevilbacktohell.com

Suggested Teaching Activities:

1. Identifying “Satyagraha”
• View DVD “Soul Power”. Begin discussion of what the story on the DVD might be about; lead discussion on the English translation of satyagraha as “Soul Force” or “Soul Power”

• On KWL chart/organizer record any information the students might know (leaders, movements)

• Discuss what questions or information they might want to find or learn about

• Begin a word wall of vocabulary

2. Determining Historical Timeline of Satyagraha; Identifying elements/principles of nonviolence campaigns

• View Brain pop movies (in order) of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, The Civil Rights Movement, and Cesar Chavez

• Have students identify similarities and differences in each leader’s use of satyagraha

• Have students create a visual timeline of nonviolence movements

3. Satyagraha for the 21st Century


• Have children identify a “cause” of injustice or inequality and organize a nonviolence campaign using some of the principles and steps learned in previous activities. Students role play protesters and antagonists to learn nonviolence techniques (can be guided with scripted scenarios)

• Art projects: Have students create posters and songs or chants that are reflective of nonviolence

For other ideas and lessons please visit: www.thinkfinity.com  keywords: Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Nonviolence, Cesar Chavez

www.teachingtolerance.org

Bibliography:

