Title of Lesson: Gandhi’s Swaraj: Power to the People

Lesson By: Sheri Halpern

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 6th Grade Social Studies
Class Size: 25-35
Time/ Duration of Lesson: 45-60 minutes

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
• Students will be able to define in writing what is “swaraj”
• Students will be able to create a Venn Diagram comparing Gandhi’s swaraj and American democracy
• Students will be able to describe orally the similarities and differences between Gandhi’s swaraj and other forms of democracy
• Students will be able to correctly identify at least 8 out of 10 (with at least 80% accuracy) scenarios as either in accordance with or not in accordance with Gandhi’s swaraj

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson shall serve to introduce about thirty sixth grade students to the conception of swaraj according to Gandhi’s teachings. It will differentiate swaraj from other, more familiar forms of democracy that are studied throughout the New York State social studies curriculum of world history for the grade level. Further, it will serve to motivate and empower students to bring about social change in their local communities. An enduring understanding will be that the principles of swaraj can be applied to governments and other organizations of people around the world.

Lesson Content:
The bulk of the content of the lesson is based on seminal Gandhi’s work, entitled Hind Swaraj. Translated by Gandhi himself, this “seed from which the tree of Gandhian thought has grown to its full stature” provides a thorough description of swaraj – a form of democratic rule that stems from the self and requires that the power of a government resides with the people.

This essence of his political philosophy claims that the governments of countries exist to serve the people who inhabit it, rather than vice-versa. While it is necessary to note the historical context of the Indian Nationalist Movement, for the purposes of this lesson, it is most important to stress this bottom-line, non-negotiable quality of his democracy that restored autonomy for the individual and extends to any community. One cannot settle for a representative government of any kind – until it represents all and not simply the majority.

For Gandhi, the concept of swaraj is not easy to define and requires personal exploration. He is certain, however, that for people who have always lived under an unjust form of rule, what they believe to be swaraj is not truly or completely free swaraj (29). In other words, “when we are slaves, we think that the whole universe is enslaved” (73).
The most comprehensive definition of swaraj that Gandhi offers in his context is:

“It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the pal of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. Hence there is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realized it, we will endeavor to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Slaves ourselves, it would be a mere pretension to think of freeing others. Now you will have seen that it is not necessary for us to have as our goal the expulsion of the English.”

The following are quotes that support the idea of swaraj and are incorporated into the digital story introduction to the mini-lesson:

“Public opinion alone can keep a society pure and healthy.” (This quote highlights the power of an informed and active body of individuals within a nation to make it successful.)

“Measures must always in a progressive society be held superior to men, who are after all imperfect…working for their fulfillment.” (This quote highlights the importance of high goals for individuals in a productive society.)

“Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.” (This quote suggests that if we are to be truly nonviolent in our quest for democracy, we must eliminate intolerance in our minds.)

“If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy we cannot afford to be intolerant.” (This quote builds on the previous quote, suggesting that tolerance is indeed a necessary condition of a successful democracy.)

“For me every ruler is alien that defies public opinion.” (This quote illuminates the inherent conflict in the notion of a ruler of a purported democracy.)

“The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing…it requires a change of heart.” (This quote highlights the human nature of democracy – while governments are created by men, they must maintain humility.)

“Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men.” (This quote deemphasizes the need for individual recognition of success in order to become truly successful in our own communities.)

“To deprive a man of his natural liberty…is worse than starving the body; it is starvation of the soul…” (This quote further aligns swaraj with the realm of the natural and necessary rather than merely artificial and desirable.)

“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.” (This quote serves to motivate its audience to be true to their dreams in spite of their grandeur.)
“A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and soul of its people.” (This quote aligns government with culture and, in turn, people – us.)

**New York State Content Standards (6th Grade Social Studies):**

- Across time and from place to place, the people of the Eastern Hemisphere have held differing assumptions regarding power, authority, governance, citizenship, and law.
- Governments change over time and from place to place to meet the changing needs and wants of their people.
- Present systems of government have their origins in the past.
- In modern political times, formalized government structures play a major role in maintaining social order and control.
- Political boundaries change over time.
- The values of Eastern Hemisphere nations affect the guarantee of human rights and the ways human needs are met.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What is a form of government that ensures full autonomy for every individual?
- How can I question and embody my own power?
- How can I lead others to question and embody their power?

**Materials Needed:**

- Digital story introduction
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Overhead (optional alternative for chart paper)

**Lesson Context:**
This lesson will fit into a unit on different forms of democracy that have existed throughout history and across various places. Alternatively, it could be part of a mini-unit on Gandhi embedded in a larger unit on India and its people’s fight for freedom from the British.

While the digital story is intended to serve as the introduction to the mini-lesson, it could also be used at the end of the previous lesson as a preview.

**Teaching Activities:**
Charting ideas of democracy, creating Venn Diagrams on handouts, small group discussion, etc.

**Assessment/Evaluation:**
Students will show mastery on written assessment listing various scenarios, as stated in the lesson description.

**Extension Activities/Enrichment:**
This lesson is designed to naturally lend itself to the inclusion of family members and the greater community, as it serves to motivate students to take social justice issues in their local
community into their own hands.

**Bibliography:**