

Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson: Gandhi on Poverty, Violence, and the Well-being of All		
Lesson By: Dennis Larsen- larsend@mpsd.k12.wi.us		
Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 8 th grade social studies	Class Size: 20 - 30	Time/ Duration of Lesson: 50 minute periods / 3 – 5 days
Goals: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) To increase student understanding of violence and the various forms that it can take.2) To increase student understanding of Gandhi’s view of the violence of poverty3) To introduce the concept of Distribution of Wealth4) To understand the concepts of Sarvodaya (Well-being of all) and Trusteeship		
Objectives: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Students will be able to construct a definition of distribution of wealth.2) Students will be able to discuss the concepts of distribution of wealth and the merits of Sarvodaya with at least an 80% on the discussion assessment form.		
Lesson Abstract: <p>In this lesson students will be looking at the connection between violence and poverty based on the quote by Gandhi, “poverty is the worst form of violence.” After watching a short video clip, students will discuss how poverty is a form of violence. They will also discuss the distribution of wealth and the fairness of the disparity that exists between the rich and the poor. Gandhi’s concept of Sarvodaya, or ‘Well-being of all’ will also be discussed.</p>		
Lesson Content: <p>Mohandas K. Gandhi lived from 1869 – 1948. He is known as the father of India and revolutionized the world with his thoughts and actions. Gandhi was much more than a political activist. His autobiography was subtitled “My Experiments with the Truth.” Gandhi devoted his life to seeking the truth. His path was one of continual reflection. All throughout his life he wrote his thoughts on a wide variety of topics.</p> <p>One topic that concerned him was economics. On a personal level, Gandhi would accurately be described as a minimalist. The possessions he owned at the end of his life were few. He believed that each person only needed enough to meet their basic needs and if each person lived his or her life this way, the distribution of wealth could be altered to provide every human with what was needed to survive. Gandhi was quoted as saying “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.”</p> <p>The world that students are living in is a world of excess. One does not have to look too far to see evidence of extravagant living, as well as the waste that is associated with that that lifestyle. We are increasingly becoming a nation of haves and have-nots. For instance, in the United States, 20 percent of the people owned 84 percent of the wealth.¹</p> <p>The source of the quote, “Poverty is the worst form of violence,” is unclear. The words, like other quotes, are attributed to him but in what context or time period he said it is not readily</p>		

known. That being said, the spirit of the quote certainly fits with his philosophy and character.

In *Selections from Gandhi* by Nirmal Kumar Bose, Gandhi spoke about the need for the re-distribution of wealth. (See Appendix). He believed that the disparity between the rich and the poor was not right. He believed that the wealthy should have enough to meet their needs but that they should take upon themselves to give their excesses away voluntarily. Gandhi also spoke of the need for trusteeship. He stated that it is best that individuals not seek wealth in the first place, as he has done. But, he also stated, if one has wealth, he or she should use the excess wealth for service. Gandhi also acknowledged that his plan would not be easy to carry out but he also points out that adopting non-violence was also not an easy task and through consistent efforts, that was put into action. Gandhi came under some criticism from capitalists for his views. He was quick to point out, in true Gandhian fashion, that he was against capitalism and not against the capitalists themselves.

Gandhi predicts a violent situation if the distribution of wealth is not made to be more equitable. “A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.”²

There is a tendency to look at GDP and other measures of wealth as a basis of quality of life. However, according to Gandhi that is not accurate. “Indeed, the test of orderliness in a country is not the number of millionaires it owns, but the absence of starvation among its masses.”³

Unto This Last by John Ruskin is a book that influenced Gandhi’s thought greatly. According to Joan Bondurant, Gandhi understood Ruskin’s message to be:

- 1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
- 2) That a lawyers work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- 3) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the craftsman, is the life worth living⁴

Bondurant makes the observation that Gandhi was aware of the first two items to varying degrees but that the third never occurred to him.

“Gandhi later wrote and published a gist of *Unto This Last*, first into Gujarati and then into English with the title, 'Sarvodaya' and implemented its principles in everything that he did. The Sanskrit word 'Sarvodaya' means 'the welfare of all'.”⁵

Essentially, Sarvodaya is the basis for Gandhi’s trusteeship idea. “The whole idea of possessing wealth only to guard it from being misused and to distribute it equitably aims at protecting human dignity.”⁶ So, the wealthy are trustees of the common good for all. According to Gandhi, any wealth in excess of enough for a basic livelihood would belong to the community to provide for the public good.

A society with a disparity in income distribution often results in some members of the society living in poverty. Gandhi viewed this as an act of violence, hence his quote, “poverty is the

worst form of violence.” When some would have it their power to alleviate suffering but make the choice not to and instead spending frivolously on themselves, that would be an act of violence.

¹ “Who Rules America: Wealth, Income, and Power.”
sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html.

² M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme*, p. 20

³ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 158

⁴ Bondurant, Joan, *Conquest of Violence*, p. 155

⁵ “Sarvodaya.” www.ssinha.com/UntoThisLast-Gandhi.doc

⁶ Kesavulu, Y. “Gandhian Trusteeship as an ‘Instrument of Human Dignity.’” *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 25, Number 4, Jan – March 2004.

Wisconsin State Content Standards:

- Social Studies Standard E.8.11 Explain how beliefs and practices, such as ownership of property or status at birth, may lead to conflict among people of different regions or cultures and give examples of such conflicts that have and have not been resolved
- Social Studies Standard C.8.7 Locate, organize, and use relevant information to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and advocate the position in a debate

Guiding Questions:

- What is poverty?
- What is violence?
- Is poverty also a form of violence?
- Is the distribution of wealth that exists in society fair?
- Do individuals have a responsibility for trusteeship? Should individuals be concerned with the well-being of all?

Materials Needed:

- LCD projector or method of viewing the movie
- Chalkboard, white board, overhead or white paper
- Classroom arrangement that allows for discussion

Lesson Context:

This lesson would fit into a unit on Gandhi where the instructor is teaching about Gandhi’s economic views. It would also fit into a general economics unit discussing the distribution of wealth.

Teaching Activities:

- 1) Think, pair, share: Have students take a few minutes to brainstorm and list acts of violence that exist in our society. After a minute or two, they are to share their ideas with a neighbor. After both parties have an opportunity to share, lead a group discussion on the perception of violence. The time for this will vary depending on the grade level and the group of students in your class.

- 2) Ask the following question: “Does our society do a good job of meeting the needs of its people? Have students provide evidence to support their statements. Again, this will vary depending on the class that you have.
- 3) Have the students share their view of poverty. What is it? Give examples.
- 4) Share the quote “Poverty is the worst form of violence.” – M. K. Gandhi. Have students discuss what this means. How can poverty be violent?
- 5) View the video clip, which shows contrasting views of poor and wealthy people. Discuss any new insights. Is there a connection between poverty and violence?
- 6) Go over procedures for discussion. (See Appendix) with students. Each teacher quite often has his or her own way of running a discussion. The rules and form are designed in such a way to have the students call on one another to build substantive conversation while the instructor assesses the discussion. Depending on the group, the instructor will need to ask clarifying questions to help steer the discussion. In addition, the instructor will want to record thoughts and questions that can be topics for future lessons or discussions.
- 7) Discuss Distribution of Wealth. Is this fair? Do the wealthy deserve to have their wealth? Are they wealthy because of hard work, ambition or education? Do the poor deserve to be poor? Are they poor because of laziness, lack of ambition or education? Assess the discussion.
- 8) Look over the readings (Appendix). Many passages are provided so that you may cut and past those that apply to the focus and ability of your class. Provide students with a copy of the readings. Depending on the ability and the focus of the class, all or parts of the articles can be used. It is suggested to read some of the passages together and dissect what Gandhi was saying about economic distribution and trusteeship. Have the students read select passages and code their reading by writing on the paper their thoughts and questions regarding the content.
- 9) Depending on the time available, conducting another discussion of Gandhi’s ideas would be in order. What did Gandhi mean by Sarvodaya? What was Gandhi calling for? Are his ideas sound? How easy or how likely would it be to establish his ideas? Why? What would be some things that would impede the implementation?
- 10) With discussions, the philosophy of participation comes into play. I don’t force my students to comment. I do use a post discussion feedback form (Appendix) that I hand out the last 5 minutes. I use the comments and questions submitted this way to continue or kick start the next day’s conversation. Having a comment shared publicly through me can be validating for the shy student. I have noticed an increase in conversation by the end of the year.

Assessment/ Evaluation:

The students will be assessed through the use of the Discussion Assessment (Handout #2 - attached).

It is important to explain the discussion form with the students ahead of time so they are aware of the expectations for the discussion.

Extension Activities/ Enrichment

Depending on the discussions about poverty and your community situation, there would be some opportunities for service projects.

Bibliography:

Bondurant, Joan V. *Conquest of Violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, pp. 153 – 159.

Bose, Nirmal Kumar. *Selections from Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948.

Gandhi, M.K. *Constructive Programme*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1941.

Parel, Anthony. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Kesavulu, Y. "Gandhian Trusteeship as an 'Instrument of Human Dignity.'" *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 25, Number 4, Jan – March 2004.

The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi. <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap53.htm>

Poverty 2005 Highlights. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty05/pov05hi.html>.

Poverty Facts and Stats. <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp>

Ruskin, John. *Unto This Last*. New York: CosimoClassics, 2006

"Who Rules America: Wealth, Income and Power."

<http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html>

Appendix: Selected thoughts from Gandhi on Economic Distribution

Selections from Gandhi, by Nirmal Kumar Bose. 1948

The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted, while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multimillionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. (75-76)

A non-violent system of governments is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry, millions persists. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good. I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach, So is non-violence difficult to attain. (77-78)

Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit the society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore the non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed. (78-79)

Source B: From Harijan 19-8-1940

As soon as a man looks upon himself as a servant of society, earns for its sake, spends for its benefit, purity enters into his earnings and there is ahimsa in his venture. Moreover, if men's minds turn towards this way of life, there will come about a peaceful revolution in society, and that without any bitterness.

If, however, in spite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find the solution to this riddle. I have lighted on nonviolent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society. Man has been conversant with violence from the beginning, for he has inherited this strength from the animal in his nature. It was only when he rose from the state of a quadruped (animal) to that of a biped (man) that the knowledge of the strength of ahimsa entered into his soul. This knowledge has grown within him slowly but surely. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and learn how to free themselves by means of nonviolence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.

Selections from “Young India” , “Modern Review”, and “Harijan”

Ideal Economy

According to me the economic constitution of India and, for the matter of that, the world should be such that no one under should suffer from want of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. (YI, 15-11-1928, p. 381)

Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth—either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry—I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.

Acquisition of Wealth

Those who own money now, are asked to behave like trustees holding their riches on behalf of the poor. You may say that trusteeship is a legal fiction. But if people meditate over it constantly and try to act up to it, then life on earth would be governed far more by love than it is at present. Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid’s definition of a point, and is equally unattainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realizing state of equality on earth than by any other method.

(Modern Review, October 1935, p. 412)

Practical Trusteeship Formula

Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.

Thus under State-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.

Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.

(Harijan, 25-10-1952, p. 301; the document, it is believed, was drafted by Prof. M. L. Dantwala

Rules for Discussion

- 1) You have permission to be uncomfortable
- 2) Please leave all putdowns outside the door
- 3) If you're not confused, you're not trying hard enough.
- 4) Everyone, without exception, has something valuable to contribute, including genuine questions and half-baked thoughts.
- 5) Please expect to share your contributions, and, if needed, to be called upon to do so.
- 6) As a general rule, new participants to the discussion have priority over previous contributors.
- 7) Look for the good and the reasonable in others' comments
- 8) Seek to understand before you critique.
- 9) It is okay, and expected, that you will disagree at times. It is NOT okay to attack or blame.
- 10) Try to be specific rather than global about agreements and disagreements. Specificity sustains engagement.
- 11) Each person is responsible for her/his own learning, although every other person can contribute to it.
- 12) Learning and discussions are processes. Be open to each.

Sample feedback given day 2

Thoughts from Day #1

- Speak so you can be heard
- Asking questions is not only okay, but encouraged
- Involve everyone, look for new comers to the discussion

Things to try

- Try saying other people's names. "I agree with what _____ was saying". Or "getting back to what _____ said."

Discussion reflection (Use the back if necessary) Name _____

- 1) What did you contribute to the discussion today? If you did not speak, please explain why?
- 2) What have you learned from the discussion? Do you have any new insights?
- 3) How are you connected to the topic? (How does it affect you?)
- 4) What questions do you have about the topic or about something that was raised during the discussion?
- 5) What suggestions do you have to improve the discussion?