Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title
Nonviolence, Violence, and Compassion

Name, School, Affiliation, Location
Stephanie Lee, Equitas Academy, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles

Grade Level/Subject Area(s)
Kindergarten, General Subjects

Duration of Lesson
Each activity can be completed in approximately 20-30 minutes segments over a period of three days.

Relevant State/National Standards
Ahimsa Institute Content Standards
1. Distinguish between nonviolence and violence
2. Describe characteristics and differences between nonviolence and violence
3. Understand the connection between nonviolence and showing compassion for others

California State Content Standards
Reading: Vocabulary Concept and Development
1.17 Identify and sort common words in basic categories (e.g., colors, shapes, foods).

Comprehension and Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text
2.3 Connect to life experiences the information and events in texts.

Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text
3.3 Identify characters, settings, and important events.

Theatre: Creation/Invention in Theatre
2.2 Retell familiar stories, sequencing story points and identifying character, setting, and conflict.

Lesson Abstract
In this lesson, students will learn the characteristics of violent and nonviolent social movements, specifically those movements led by Gandhi and Chavez. Students will understand the characteristics of violence and nonviolence by engaging in cooperative theatre exercises, read alouds, and graphic organizers. By understanding the differences in violent and nonviolent social movements, students will develop their understanding of compassion and how Gandhi and Chavez demonstrated compassion for others.
Guiding Questions
1. What are characteristics of nonviolence and violence?
2. What are the differences between nonviolence and violence?
3. How did Gandhi and Chavez use nonviolence in their social movements?
4. How does nonviolence demonstrate compassion? (Addressed in activities)
5. How did Gandhi and Chavez show compassion for others?

Content Essay
Throughout history people have created or responded to social change with violent or nonviolent actions. As young students, we usually read about the violent actions because that is people’s natural and common reaction to social change. The nonviolent actions for social change are also briefly mentioned in the history books, but usually for the violent responses that they provoke. For example, when studying the civil rights movement, students study counter sit-ins, but focus on the violence of the civil rights opponents’ reaction to those counter sit-ins. The lack of attention dedicated to nonviolent actions in the history books gives the impression that these actions are less interesting and important to our history. However, the nonviolent actions are actually the ones that require more inner-strength from its participants and achieve the same ends as violent actions. This essay will explain the different characteristics of violence and nonviolence, and the effective nonviolent tactics utilized by Mohandas Gandhi and Cesar Chavez to bring social change to their communities.

Violence is defined as inflicting emotional or physical hurt upon others, and occurs when there is a division. The division can be within oneself, between oneself and others, or between humans and nature (Sethia, 7/26/11). Violence is often used to purposefully defeat and exploit the other for control and power. Most violence is usually committed unconsciously, but physical violence can be argued as a conscious action (Sethia, 7/26/11). One might think that the opposite of violence is nonviolence, but in fact nonviolence is not the absence of violence.

Nonviolence is defined as a response to violence by choosing not to participate (Sethia, 7/26/11). Nonviolence is characterized by unity among members of a community and is conducted through mindful and intentional actions. The desired result of nonviolence is to change an oppressor’s mind and generate negotiations and collaboration between the divided parties (Sethia, 7/26/11). Mohandas Gandhi and Cesar Chavez are two historical examples of how nonviolence can effectively bring social change.

Both Gandhi and Chavez deliberately chose nonviolence to change their communities and fight for equal rights. While Gandhi’s and Chavez’s nonviolent movements utilized different tactics (i.e. marches, strikes, civil disobedience, etc.), both clearly demonstrated the unity characteristic of nonviolence. In unifying their communities, both used religion to draw people in and connected their movements to a higher truth. Gandhi used prayer groups to gather people, and recited various religions’ prayers that motivated people to stand up for freedom. Chavez’s designed his nonviolent tactics to mirror the religious practices of pilgrimage and penitence (Orosco, 7/31/11). While religion was the common ground that Gandhi and Chavez initially used to unify people, they also motivated people to continue their social
movements by utilizing other characteristics of nonviolence. Gandhi motivated the Indians by teaching them the importance of mindful choices. Chavez motivated the farmworkers by making them believe that they could change their oppressors’ minds through understanding and compassion.

Gandhi believed that India’s freedom began with the individual and that people would be propelled by an individual dedication to a higher truth and a simpler life. Gandhi’s choice to use nonviolence stemmed from his desire to create a civil society. Gandhi viewed modern society as one that is plagued by modernity, machines, diseases, and isolation. He claimed that a civil society was distinguished by a community where all work was valued, all individuals participated in constructive work, and people lived in a state of simplicity (Parel, p. 33-37). In order to create a civil society, people had to abandon selfish, modern pursuits because these pursuits inflicted structural and economic violence on others; and instead needed to embrace a simpler lifestyle. Therefore, if people wanted to change society and their living conditions, they needed to make mindful and intentional decisions to lead a constructive and simpler life for themselves. As a result, people would be working towards building a civil society where all persons were equally valued.

Chavez motivated the farmworkers’ by making them believe that they (the farmworkers) could change the minds of their oppressors through understanding and compassion. Before Chavez could change the farm owners’ minds, he needed to clearly understand all the farmworkers’ prospectives. To develop his understanding, Chavez (with the help of Dolores Huerta) gathered stories by going door-to-door of the migrant workers. While Chavez and Huerta gathered stories, they also spoke to people about their personal power to make change. Chavez told people that only they had the power to change the minds by building the oppressors’ understanding and compassion. Chavez stated, "Like Gandhi, because we [didn’t] have the economic or political force, we [had] to appeal to the moral force" (Ingram, p. 106). Chavez wanted the farmworkers to understand that they had the to power to change minds because their stories were human stories and just as important as their oppressors’ stories.

Farmworkers were able to appeal to the public’s morality by providing information about their working conditions, pay, and later the bodily damage of pesticides. Chavez also appealed to the oppressors’ understanding and compassion by writing a variety of letters, such as the Good Friday Letter. The Good Friday Letter outlined the farmworkers’ purpose and discussed the human aspects of their struggle. Chavez stated:

[We] are above all human beings, no better no worse than any other cross section of human society; we are not saints because we are poor but by the same measure neither are we immoral. We are mean and women who have suffered and endured much and not only because of our abject poverty but because we have been kept poor. (Stavans, p. 61)

Chavez’s goal was to make the farm owners understand the conditions and hardships that farmworkers faced, and tried to appeal to them on a human level.
The social movements led by Gandhi and Chavez clearly demonstrated the characteristics of nonviolence. Both highlighted the importance of unity and togetherness. Gandhi demonstrated the importance of making mindful decisions by helping people understand that their decisions impacted others. He believed that change began with the individual and grew outward to others. Chavez, on the other hand, demonstrated the importance of appealing to the minds and hearts of the oppressors and encouraged the farmworkers to do the same. He understood that the farmworkers’ oppression was not simply imposed by the farm owners, but by a social structure that needed to be changed by the larger public’s understanding. Regardless, of their focuses or which characteristic of nonviolence they demonstrated, both men were successful in bringing change to their communities.

**Bibliography**


**Teaching Activities**

**Activity #1: The Characteristics, Similarities and Differences between Nonviolence and Violence (this activity may take 40-50 minutes)**

**Nonviolent Action**
- Show students a photo of nonviolent social action (i.e. Civil Rights marchers, farmworkers boycotting, etc.)
- Discuss what is happening in the photo, what do they see
- Point out that in the picture people are using nonviolent actions
- Define nonviolence as people working together to solve a problem without hurting anyone. For example, when they have a problem with a friend (or sibling), they should talk about the problem and not hit each other. Be sure to also explain that why it is not better choice to hit back.
• Choose one nonviolent activist on the photo and ask students to focus on them
• Ask the students how that person feels, what they are thinking, what are they hearing, what are they seeing, what are holding, etc.
  *Students can also think-pair-share their ideas
• As students offer their responses, write down their words onto chart paper
• On the chart paper, draw the shape of a person (i.e. a gingerbread man shape) and write down students’ responses on the person where their response matches. For example, when a student responds to how they person is feeling, write their words on the person’s heart. Or when a student states what the person is seeing, write their words on the chart person’s eyes.
• Ask students to stand up and create a tableau (a frozen action) of the nonviolent activist
• While the students are in their tableaus, ask a few how it feels to be in this pose and write down their responses on the bottom of the chart paper
• Repeat the above steps with an opponent in the picture (i.e. a police officer, a non-activist, etc.)

Violent Action (could be done before nonviolent action)
• Repeat the above activities again, but with a violent photo (i.e. marchers and police clashing, people yelling at others, etc.)
• Point out that this photo is of violent actions
• Define violence as people hurting others’ feelings or bodies

Compare and Contrast
• Put students into partners and provide them numbers (1,2)
• Tell students that they will be making tableaus from the picture with their partner
• Show the students the first nonviolent photo
• Students that are #1s will be the nonviolent activist (and point to the one that was previously discussed) and #2s will be the non-activists (also the one previous discussed)
• Model how to create a tableau with a partner
• Count down and have the students create their tableaus
• Then ask the #1s and #2s to switch parts, and count down again
• Discuss with the students how they felt when they were the nonviolent activist and the non-activist
• Be sure to is discuss if they felt scared or hurt (in either part)
• Repeat the above activities with the violent photo, but be sure to tell students that they are not going to really touch each other in their tableaus (they’re just going to pretend)
• Discuss how they felt in the their violent parts, and if they were more or less scared than
• Also ask students, which action made them feel better, the nonviolent or the violent
**Activity #2: The Peace Book**

- Review the meanings of nonviolence (people working together to solve a problem without hurting anyone) and violence (people hurting others’ feelings or bodies)
- Tell the students that you will be reading a book about peace, and peace means everyone using nonviolence
- Read *The Peace Book*
- Throughout the story, stop to discuss how each action demonstrates nonviolence and how the opposite would be violence. For example, everyone having a piece of pizza is nonviolence because everyone is sharing. But if you have lots of pizza and do not share it than you are showing violence because you are hurting someone's feelings.
- After the story, create a circle map of all the nonviolent actions in the story
- Tell students that when they showing nonviolence, they are showing compassion
- Define compassion as taking care of others

*You could then tell students that you will be looking for compassionate students today, and if you catch them being compassionate they will earn a heart sticker*  
*You could also have students reward each other for compassionate actions*

**Activity #3: Differences between Nonviolence and Violence**

- Review the meanings of nonviolence (people working together to solve a problem without hurting anyone) and violence (people hurting others’ feelings or bodies)
- Hand out pictures to each student that either shows nonviolence or violence (no guns, blood, etc.)
- Pictures for nonviolence should show unity, people participating in compassionate or caring acts, and working together
- Pictures for violence should show people being alone or divided, not sharing or caring for someone that is hurt, and images that convey emotional and physical violence
- Place T-chart in front of the classroom; one side for nonviolence and the other for violence
- Have students come to the front of the room and place their picture on the nonviolent or violent side
- Point out two or three pictures on both side and ask the students to explain why the picture shows nonviolence or violence

**Materials**

**Activity #1**

- Nonviolent and violent social action photos
- Chart paper
- Markers
**Activity #2**
- *The Peace Book* book
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Heart stickers

**Activity #3**
- Approximately 13 pictures of nonviolent actions
- Approximately 13 pictures of violent actions
- Premade T-Chart on chart paper
- Adhesive material (tape, glue, duck putty)

**Digital Story**

The digital story is a brief introduction of the biographies of Gandhi and Chavez. The digital story can be shown at the end of the lesson, as an introduction to further discussion of the importance of nonviolence and two people that used nonviolence.