Title:
Creating a Culture of Ahimsa

Lesson By:
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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
Middle School, Leadership Class or school-wide

Duration of Lesson:
50 minute classes, 5 days with possible extension activities

Content Standards: Washington State
History 4.2: Understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history
Social Studies 5.1: Uses critical reasoning skills to analyze and evaluate positions
Communication 1.2: Understands, analyzes, synthesizes, or evaluates information from a variety of sources

Lesson Abstract:
The purpose of this lesson is to enable students to recognize the role of violence in their own lives and develop alternatives. Through studying the work of leaders such as Gandhi and Chavez, students will work to develop models for school and community that will work toward developing a culture of ahimsa.

Guiding Questions:
- What events led Gandhi and Chavez to focus on nonviolence as a solution to social issues?
- How did Gandhi and Chavez build a community of nonviolence in their social action?
- How can we use the work of Gandhi and Chavez to begin to build a community of nonviolence?

Content Essay:
‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing’ Edmund Burke

Throughout history we have seen evidence of humans who are willing to rise up in the face of violence and injustice. Men like Gandhi and Cesar Chavez serve as examples of how to live lives that embody nonviolence and transform others and our society. Our youth today stand in need of their teachings, as daily their lives are subjected to violence, pain, and suffering. What better role models could we present in our classrooms?

Gandhi’s Journey Toward Nonviolence
The lifework of Gandhi demonstrates a journey to nonviolence that is unparalleled in history. Gandhi faced situations that would have brought many people to violence, but instead throughout his life he developed and practiced alternatives to this response. One of the first
recorded situations took place on his return to India from his study of law in England. While working with his brother, Laxmidas, in Rajkot Gandhi was asked to intercede on his behalf with a local authority. Gandhi knew the British Political Agent, Charles Ollivant, from his days in London. Instead of listening to the pleas of Gandhi, Ollivant had him physically removed from his office. Being subjected to this insult enraged Gandhi, but he followed the advice of a prominent Indian lawyer, Sir Pherozeshah, and did not pursue legal action against the agent. (Sethia, p. 28) Gandhi drew life lessons from this experience. He learned to focus on the action, not the individual, but also to maintain his own integrity. In pursuing the case he had gone against his own principles. He vowed to never again “place himself in a false position.” (Sethia, p. 28)

This was not to be Gandhi’s sole experience with prejudice and injustice. In 1893 Gandhi traveled to South Africa to continue his legal career. There he faced persecution as he was tossed from a railway car for riding in first class. After an agonizing night of personal reflection he made an important decision. Instead of suing, he chose to develop a personal understanding of the root-cause of the color prejudice of the country. Gandhi’s transformative journey of self-actualization had truly begun.

As a part of his journey, Gandhi explored a variety of religious traditions. He had developed a sense of religious pluralism in his youth as the Hindu home of his parents was open to friends of many faiths. He grew up listening to conversations laced with references to many religious traditions. While in South Africa his Christian friends began to invite him to services and engage him in religious discussions. This also occurred with his Muslim friends. Gandhi remained grounded in his own traditions, but always respected the faiths of others. “Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?” (Gandhi, p. 51-52) His study of religion did, however, lead him to the conclusion that service was “a means of pursuing self-actualization... the full potential of his humanity.” (Sethia, p. 35-36) This passion for community service led Gandhi to his work in South Africa. He began to develop his views for social reform, or transformation. The situation of Indians in South Africa was dehumanizing. The British had passed laws and treated Indians in such a way that they were denied their very humanity. Indians were forced to walk in roads, not on sidewalks, not allowed to participate in elections, not allowed to attend public schools, or even stay in “white only” hotels. True change, or transformation, for Gandhi could not occur without individual transformation. Gandhi began to meet and speak to change the lives of Indians, not that of the British.

Gandhi’s work in South Africa continued for far longer than he had ever imagined. He represented indentured servants in their legal cases, published newspaper articles describing conditions of Indians, and worked on his personal transformation. A life lesson for him occurred with his wife. She was not willing to empty the chamber pot of an “untouchable” who was staying in their house. Gandhi became furious, and almost threw her out of the house. He was filled with remorse for his actions and learned the lesson that the “means must be worthy of their ends.” (Sethia, p. 47) This lesson is stated in Hind Swaraj: “I wish only to show that only fair means can produce fair results, and that, at least in the majority of cases, if not indeed, in all, the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms. There is harm in the exercise of brute force, never in that of pity.” (Gandhi, p. 82) A simple lesson learned through a violent encounter with his wife remained with Gandhi and formed a principle that would shape the rest of his life.
Social reform in South Africa was approached by Gandhi through his principles of truth and nonviolence. He worked with the Indian community there to resist through “satyagraha, insisting on truth through nonviolence and enduring suffering in the process.” (Sethia, p. 55) He trained followers in the way of passive resistance, preparing them for violating unjust laws, being beaten, and arrested, and losing their ways of lives. During the course of this time, he also experienced betrayal by the British as he helped them during the Zulu “rebellion.” He came to realize that the British were not truly playing “fair”, but were enforcing violent, dehumanizing policies. It also convinced him that violence does not serve as a solution for violence. He focused instead on inner strength, or truth. Gandhi believed that the very soul was truth, so satyagraha became “soul-force.” A person of integrity, true to him/herself, has moral power and can transform an oppressor through personal suffering. He demonstrated that on his Epic March in South Africa in 1913. Thousands of Indian Africans joined Gandhi, remaining civil even when threatened, beaten, or arrested. As a result, an agreement was reached with the government that addressed many of the issues. “The biggest gain for him (Gandhi) was not in the specifics of the agreement. Rather, it was in the vindication of satyagraha itself, which demonstrated the power of transformation of conflict.” (Sethia, p. 74) As Gandhi stated “An arm striking the air will become disjointed.” (Gandhi, p. 54)

Gandhi returned to India to put his principles of nonviolence into action. He did not believe that gaining home-rule, or swaraj, was simply a matter of kicking the British out of India. He strove to put into place the principles of satyagraha that he had established in his work in South Africa. For Gandhi, the first step is with the individual. Self-rule, or swaraj, must begin there. When the inner soul is in balance, has achieved a state of equanimity, than one can begin one’s work in the world. Humans learn to be self-disciplined and have control over passions and greed. For Gandhi, the world is about connection and community, not individual desires for materials gains. He wanted his nation to achieve a state of poorna swaraj, of complete independence by truthful and non-violent means. (Gandhi, p. 169) Gandhi used ahimsa to accomplish these means. Ahimsa is the action of passive resistance, whether refusing to obey unjust laws, boycotting British made goods, or marching to draw attention to wrongs. He states, “When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force.” (Gandhi, p. 88) He stressed that this had to be done without using any violence. “Passive resistance…is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms.” (Gandhi, p. 91) “Persuasion, dialogue, negotiation, and compromise are the very heart of satyagraha work, just as are non-cooperation and civil disobedience when necessary. A satyagrahi aims at transforming the adversary through love and self-sacrifice.” (Sethia, p. 94) Gandhi knew that becoming such an individual took courage and outlined essentials of observing chastity, adopting poverty, following truth, and cultivating fearlessness. Although not easy to follow, allowing just a few of these to enter into one’s core being can bring about personal transformation. His principles of ahimsa and satyagraha led Indians to participate in the Great Salt March of 1930, as well as boycotts and non-cooperation with British rules. Eventually it helped to bring about the independence of the nation of India and continues to transform the lives of people today.

Chavez and his Journey of Nonviolence
Cesar Chavez is another who worked to create a culture of nonviolence in a system predicated on the principle that those in power are free to subjugate and abuse others. Chavez grew up in a Mexican American family who faced a reversal of fortune. After losing their home they were forced to join the farm workers who migrated from field to field in search of work.
Throughout his childhood, Chavez faced prejudice from educators, field bosses, and ordinary people. Mexicans were treated as “ignorant” and “dirty.” His mother, however, had a deep faith and taught him to always help others. She also had a profound sense of justice, and sometimes would cause her family to be fired when she would stand up to a contractor. As Chavez stated in his eulogy of her, “Our mother used to say there is a difference between being of service and being a servant.” (Chavez, p. 222) She also countered traditional cultural beliefs by teaching her children to not be violent. Chavez quotes her, “No, it’s best to turn the other cheek. God gave you senses like eyes and mind and tongue, and you can get out of anything. It takes two to fight, and one can’t do it alone.” (Chavez, p. 223) These early lessons became the foundation of the transformative work Chavez was to undertake.

In 1951 Chavez began to work with Fred Ross and the Community Services Organization to help Mexican Americans in their civil rights struggle. Eventually he broke away from that organization and, with others like Dolores Huerta, formed the National Farm Workers Association. What he started became known as La Causa, the farm worker struggle. This work is described as “a social movement intent on making deep inroads into American society in order to cultivate a culture of peace.” (Orosco, p. 23) Chavez did not want his movement to use violence to achieve their goals, and was concerned at how deeply American society associated violence with power and authority. “Most of us honor violence in one way or another. We insist on our own way, grab for security and trample on other people in the process.” (Chavez, p. 120) He sought to present “an alternative way to conceive of self-realization and strength.” (Orosco, p. 23) For Chavez, this way was rooted in his Mexican cultural and religious traditions, as well as the works of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and other labor activists.

Chavez used similar strategies to those of Gandhi. Like Gandhi, he undertook a long march with followers to draw attention to unjust conditions. For Chavez, it was also a religious pilgrimage. This concept was familiar to his constituents and helped them to feel comfortable and welcomed in the march. He also focused on penitence. For both Gandhi and King the acts of penance and purification are essential. By suffering the protestors learn how to respond and react to the violence they might face. Chavez fasted, another form of suffering that Gandhi endured. “The purpose of Chavez’s penitential suffering then was not to coerce others to act. There was no demand attached to it.” (Orosco, p. 28) Farm workers identified with Chavez as it touched deeply rooted cultural elements. This suffering also focused attention away from the powerful, instead placing it on the penitent. What a strong message it is when the world is focused on those who suffer for justice, not on those who inflict the suffering.

Chavez was always clear in his mission that only nonviolent tactics be employed. He trained those involved to not respond when provoked, either physically or verbally. He lamented harmful acts and fasted when violence broke out. That is not to say that he did not use action. For both Gandhi and Chavez, nonviolence is active resistance. This can take many forms. Workers were encouraged to employ planes de tortuga, or turtle work. Rather than destroy or harm people or objects, they worked slowly to prevent growers from making a profit. While Gandhi was always totally transparent in his tactics, Chavez tolerated sabotage as a means to weaken the oppressor.

**Implications for the Classroom**

Both Gandhi and Chavez worked from the philosophy of nonviolence as noncooperation with evil. In working with students in our classrooms, there are many lessons we can draw from them. To begin with, individuals must work on self-actualization. For me, this means gaining an
inner balance wherein I am grounded in my beliefs and act with integrity. A favorite quote associated with this is “Integrity means doing the right thing even when no one is looking.” Each individual must live his/her own life remaining true to the inner being, keeping right actions in mind at all times. Once the individual is grounded, it is possible to meet violent acts without succumbing to violence. The work of authors like James C. Hunter with the emphasis on personal character development can be helpful in the classroom. Using lessons that require students to examine the values that define their everyday lives in a first step on this journey toward self-actualization. However, as Gandhi teaches in *Hind Swaraj*, this act of each person knowing him/herself (*swaraj*) “has to be experienced by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another.” (Gandhi, p. 71) Gandhi also expresses that education should be involved in the process of teaching such traits: “Character-building has the first place in it, and that is primary education.” (Gandhi, p. 100)

Once the foundation of personal *swaraj* is taught, then three variations of nonviolence can be presented. First, there is coercion. These are tactics designed to take away the ability of those in power to maintain the status quo by withholding cooperation. For Gandhi, this was withholding cooperation in the form of labor, money, obedience. For Chavez, it was the strike, withholding labor from the fields. This is a tough love type approach, where you stop the action, but embrace the oppressor. Next, there is conversion. These are tactics designed to change of the minds of the authorities. Chavez demonstrated that tactic in his “Good Friday” letter where he appealed to the president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit Association. Gandhi’s fast served to coerce his followers, as well as the British officials. The purpose is to convert not just the multitudes, but also those in authority. Finally, there is persuasion, the art of altering the beliefs of the oppressors. This strategy demonstrates that the nonviolent participants have valid concerns and must be taken seriously. The Sacramento March in 1966 and the Great Salt March of 1930 were such undertakings. Both Gandhi and Chavez also did conversion work through their training and leadership at ashrams and Forty Acres.

For our students it is essential to tie these lessons into their lives. Through the examination of the works of these two leaders, students can begin to transform their own lives, as well as that of their schools. Using skills like coercion students can begin campaigns to influence how their peers view and use social networking sites such as *Facebook*. Conversion can take place as students demonstrate to others their nonviolence in social settings at school and home. Finally persuasion can be used as students write letters, organize marches, or find equally compelling actions that resonate in their lives.

Our task as educators is huge, but the goal of transforming our school climate is worthwhile. For both Gandhi and Chavez, service to others is ultimately where we are called in our lives’ journeys. It is a long journey, but time is on the side of those who serve.

“For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery of the world.”

Prayer of an 8th century Buddhist saint recited daily by the Dalai Lama
Bibliography:


Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:

Day 1:
Materials needed:  M & M’s
  Butcher paper and markers
  - Begin with the activity as follows:
    M & M “Arm Wrestle”

Introduction into Violence Lesson

Procedure:
2) Tell students to partner up with someone approximately the same height as them.
3) Next, tell students that they are going to have an opportunity to earn some M&Ms! (Pass out 10 M&Ms to each pair of students and tell them not to eat them because they have not earned them yet.)
4) Without using the term “arm wrestle” tell students that you want them to get into position with their partner. (You demonstrate by getting into an arm wrestling position with a student, but do not say “arm wrestle”)
5) Next, describe to students that they are going to have 30 seconds to earn these M&Ms. Each time that the back of their partner’s hand touches the desk or floor, they have earned an M&M. Tell them not to waste time in between earning M&Ms because they only have 30 seconds total.
6) Don’t give students too much time to think or ask questions…Ready…On your mark…get set…GO!
7) Time students for 30 seconds.
8) At the end of 30 seconds tell students to stop and separate the M&Ms that they did not earn from the ones that they did.
9) Tell students that you are walking around to collect all the M&Ms that they did not earn. (Put them in an empty Ziplock Bag where students can see through. If you don’t have a clear bag any bag will do)
10) Next, while students are watching, take some paint or something liquid that would ruin the M&Ms and poor it into the bag of M&Ms.
11) Play it up and mix the bag around a bit to make sure the M&Ms are ruined.
12) Walk over to a garbage can and throw the bag into the garbage can.
13) As soon as you throw the bag into the can say, “Now that is wasted potential! Why?”
14) Conversation will lead to the different strategies that students used. Some will have not earned any M&Ms because they both stayed at a stalemate competing the entire time. Some will have been overpowered or just gave in, while a group or two may have figured out real quick to just compromise and let each other hit the other person’s hand 5 times and then share in the reward. (Note: Compromise is one of the ideals)

15) Finally, ask students why they naturally competed? (You didn’t ever use the term “arm-wrestle”)

Whole Class Discussion: How is this exercise related to violence?
Topic: What is violence? Divide students into small groups. Each group must come up with a three column chart. One column is their definition of violence, one column has examples of violence, and the third column where violence takes place. Return to whole group and share. Direct discussion to a definition of violence that includes the concept that violence is any humanly inflicted harm, physical, verbal, or structural. The common component is dehumanization of people, that they are stripped of their humanity.
Next, do the activity with the concept of nonviolence….what is it and why is it couched in terms of a negative?

Exit slip: personal response: Where and how does violence touch your life today?

Days 2-4:
Materials needed: DVD, “The Making of the Mahatma:
DVD: “Viva La Causa” (available from Teaching Tolerance website)

Begin each day with an activity designed to build community in the classroom. I have included three:
Blanket Ball
Must have two or more teams standing around their blanket. Each team member grips the edge of their team’s blanket with both hands creating a cradle in which for the ball to be thrown and caught. The challenge is working together to thrust the ball up and out of the blanket in a manner that is can be caught by the other team’s blanket group. Be sure to talk about safety before this activity. Pulling unexpectedly hard on one side of the blanket can pull a team member off of their feet. A large area is best so group can move, adjust, and throw the ball high. Once the groups get good at it, have them count the number of successful catches without having the ball drop and challenge them to beat their score.

Calculator
Place 30 numbered spots in an area that has been sectioned off with a rope or other markers. Numbers should be in random order. The team goes to the boundary area to touch the buttons one at a time in numerical order. Only one person can be in the boundary area at one time. Be strict on this rule and time how long it takes the team to complete the task. Each member of the team must touch at least one number. Give the group a chance to improve their score with planning time in between.
Debrief questions include: What roles did people play? Whose voices were heard the most during planning? How did you improve your time? What do you know about this group that you did not know before?

Change in Appearance
This activity is done in pairs and is meant to challenge your level of observation. In a pair, two people go back to back and change 5 things about their appearance. The two then face again and see if they can tell what was changed. The group turn around and change 5 more things, repeating the process. Can go another 5, where participants will start telling you how hard this assignment is. Debrief questions include: What does it feel like? What did you think?, What reflects on the change process?
Lesson:
For the next three days watch all or part of the two videos. Discussion questions may include the following:
Where did Gandhi and Chavez encounter violence in their lives?
How did they respond to that violence?
What supported them in their quest for nonviolence?
What strategies, skills, or methods did they use?
What role did others play in their journeys?

Exit slips: Daily reflections of what was observed during the videos

Day 5:
Materials needed:
Begin with an activity designed to help build community

Gumdrop Bridges
In groups of 4-5, each group is given the same materials including: one paper plate, a handful of spaghetti noodles (uncooked), gumdrops, orange gumdrop slices and gum drop apple rings. Each group is given the one basic direction “Your job is to build using the supplies given and nothing else.” Set a time limit and allow students to go to work! Discussion questions: What was your group goal? Did you discuss your plan first? How did you come to a decision? What cooperative methods did you use? Who were the lead designers? Who were the best listeners? What did it take to reach a consensus? Did you ever feel like you weren't being heard? How did you handle this? What were some of the methods on communication used by members?

Lesson:
Review learnings from the movie. Teach vocabulary:

  Ahimsa
  Swaraj
  Satyagraha

Remind students of the work we have already been doing on character traits and tie this into the concept of swaraj, or self-rule. Using the ideas of the video review and brainstorm specific examples of nonviolence (ahimsa) and active resistance (satyagraha.) Develop a list of strategies used by both Gandhi and Chavez. Then tie those strategies into three categories: coercion, conversion, and persuasion. Discuss, what using those strategies would look like in our school, our home, our community. Allow students to work in small groups to come up with examples.

Exit Slip: One way to use a nonviolent strategy in your personal life.

EXTENSIONS:
There are many websites with great ideas for extending this concept and building cultures of nonviolence. My plan is to have students explore these sites and develop plans that fit the needs and concerns of our community. Here are just a few:
64 Ways to Practice Nonviolence http://www.k-state.edu/nonviolence/links/64waysNV.htm
National Peace Academy http://nationalpeaceacademy.us/
Season for Nonviolence: http://www.agnt.org/node/10
Global Campaign for Peace Education http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/


Also, work with students on ideas for the damage done through their social networking. This is a new opportunity for students to take ownership in ways to build, not destroy, relationships and community.

Finally, the following is an adaptation of an activity designed to bring into focus how we treat each other and begin to establish a community of respect and appreciation. It is a great closing activity for a major unit of this nature.
**Sticks and Stones**

We’ve all heard the saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” However, as research and our own personal experience have shown, name calling (verbal violence) can be far more damaging than physical violence. This activity is designed to show the power of names and the challenge of breaking this cycle of violence.

**Materials:** a small piece of neutral colored construction paper for each person and markers

**Procedures:**

- Hand out papers and instruct each person to tear their paper into the shape of a stone.
- Discuss the phrase from above and share a few personal stories.
- Hand out markers.
- Have each person write on the stone they created one of the following:
  - Either names he/she has been called
  - Or names he/she has called others

Next, discuss the damage….the emotional scars these words leave on our hearts….the fact that these words are never forgotten but are carried with us in our lives.

- Have everyone gather solemnly in a circle, preferably on the floor.
- Silently crumble your stones and toss them into the middle, reflecting on the pain inflicted.
- After some silence, have each person pick a stone from the middle and read OUT LOUD the words….this can be very painful to hear….but the impact it makes is enormous.
- As each stone is read, tape it to a “wall” (white board or butcher paper)
- After all words are read, reflect about the pain represented on that wall and talk about this representing a wall of intolerance, a wall that keeps people separated from each other rather than building community.
- Discuss whether this place (school, home, business, wherever) is a place where such a wall should stand.
- When people are ready, have each go to the wall and take down one stone that speaks to them….one stone that they are ready to get rid of forever.
- Ask individuals to silently vow to never again use the words that they have removed from the wall.
- Celebrate the tearing down of the wall😊 (And be sure to THROW away the stones….we don’t want to recycle these words!)