

LESSON PLAN #1: NONVIOLENCE

For Students in Grades 6-8

Based on the documentary, **GANDHI'S GIFT** (57 minutes). Featuring footage and photographs from sites of Gandhi's life. With commentary by Gandhi experts, such as Dr. Rajmohan Gandhi, historian and grandson, who was with him during his final days.

Introduction

Throughout history, violence has been used to overthrow oppressive rulers and governments and fight injustice. But violence is harmful to human beings, physically and psychologically, and can be harmful culturally, economically and environmentally. Nonviolence is an alternative to violence that can be an effective answer to oppression and injustice. Calling himself a "soldier of peace," Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948)* created a new nonviolent strategy to answer violence and fight injustice. He said this nonviolent resistance differed from "passive resistance" because it was not passive and required great courage. He said it gave every person anywhere the power to resist oppression and injustice. **GANDHI'S GIFT** shows him using nonviolent methods to bring peace and unity as he is surrounded by hatred and violence at the end of his life.

**The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. <https://www.mkgandhi.org/cwmg.htm>

Film Summary

GANDHI'S GIFT documents the final years of Gandhi, called Mahatma or "Great Soul." It begins with his release from prison at 74 in 1944 for starting the largest campaign of nonviolent protest in history, "Quit India" (1942-44). Some protestors were violent during "Quit India," but Gandhi asked them to be nonviolent. The film shows him using nonviolent methods to restore peace after terrible interreligious violence breaks out because of India's partition: he makes a grass-roots pilgrimage, meets with refugees daily and conducts two fasts. The film ends with his assassination by Hindu extremists in 1948.

Background

The British Empire began their formal rule of India in 1858. Gandhi launched the "Quit India" campaign in 1942 to show Britain that it could no longer rule India and should leave. He wanted to prove that Indians could rule themselves and create a diverse, tolerant, nonviolent society. He also intended to show the world an alternative to violence and war during World War II (1939-45).

Because of "Quit India," Gandhi was put in prison for 21 months, during which he lost his wife and personal secretary, who had accompanied him. He also became so

ill that he almost died. The political result of his campaign was that British leaders realized they had to “quit India.” They finally did on August 15, 1947. Gandhi had freed 350 million Indians from rule by the largest empire the world had known, using only nonviolent methods. How large? In the 1890’s, it ruled ¼ of the planet.

Although Gandhi won independence for India, his dream of a nonviolent, unified India was lost because British and Indian politicians agreed to divide India along religious lines, creating a new Muslim state, Pakistan. Because of this “partition” and mass migration of people, violence broke out among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, with untold thousands injured and killed. Estimates run as high as 1-2 million deaths.** The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates 14 million were forced to leave their homes as refugees.** This is the largest mass migration in history.

Gandhi almost despaired but rallied to work for peace on a grass-roots level in communities that had experienced interreligious violence. He believed that someone practicing nonviolence must be willing to suffer and die instead of inflicting injury. During his last years, he risked his life again and again to stop violence. On January 30, 1948, a Hindu extremist who resented his sympathy for Muslims murdered him on his way to his interfaith prayer meeting. His death halted the interreligious killing by extremists for about 40 years.***

** D’Costa, Bina. *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia*, p. 53.

** UNCHR. ”Rupture in South Asia,” Retrieved August 16, 2014.

***According to Featured Film Commentator Dr. Rajmohan Gandhi.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about Mahatma Gandhi and historical legacy.
- Learn about the geography and history of India.
- Analyze Gandhi’s use of nonviolent methods to achieve independence and fight injustice and violence.
- Learn about the historical connection between Gandhi and the early U.S. civil rights movement.
- Analyze the phenomenon of interreligious conflict and violence.
- Define and analyze “refugees.”
- Analyze colonialism as exemplified by the British in India.

Estimated Class Time Required: Four one-hour classes (two partial as preparation; one to view film; one to discuss)

Materials Required: **GANDHI’S GIFT** film; Lesson Plan; computer access.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

SETTING THE STAGE—IN A CLASS PRIOR TO VIEWING FILM (10-15 min.)

INTRODUCTION TO FILM: Introduce the film by telling students that they will watch a one-hour documentary about Gandhi in his final years, called **GANDHI'S GIFT** (1944-48). Read the **Film Summary** (Page 1).

RESEARCH HOMEWORK BEFORE VIEWING FILM (copy list as handout):

- a) Find Pune, Maharashtra, India on a map, where Gandhi is released from prison at start of the film.
- b) Find Juhu Beach, Bombay (now Mumbai), Calcutta (now Kolkata), Delhi and Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), all depicted in film.
- c) Compare India before and after India's partition (1947). Locate West Pakistan and East Pakistan (map of 1947), which became Bangladesh (in 1971). Locate the countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh now.
- d) Compare sizes of India and Great Britain in 1944, also their populations.
- e) Research: when did Britain begin to rule India?
- f) What was the East India Company and its role in India?
- g) Investigate how the British had been taking Indian resources and controlling Indian industries, such as textiles. (Until the mid-1700's, India and China had been the most prosperous regions on earth. In 1750, India's share of world manufacturing was 24.5%, higher than all of Europe combined. By 1900, during Gandhi's life, 1869-1948, India's share had fallen to 1.7%, due in large part to Britain's taking over its resources and industries.****)

****Mukerjee, Madhursree, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India in World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

****Copley, Antony, *Gandhi: Against the Tide* (Oxford: University Press, 1996).

SETTING THE STAGE—IN A SECOND CLASS PRIOR TO FILM (20-30 min.)

Have students report their research. Ask for a definition of "colonialism" and how Great Britain in India is an example.

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY—THE DAY YOU VIEW THE FILM (5 min.)

You might want to reread the **Film Summary** (Page 1).

Explain to students that at the start of the film, at 74 Gandhi is at a low point in his life. Ask the students to notice why he is so sad. After prison, what is his biggest heartache?

(the violence of his people). Pay particular attention to what he himself says (an Indian actor voices real statements Gandhi made and wrote). Take note of what nonviolent actions he takes to restore peace and unity. How does his philosophy of nonviolence differ from others in the film: those who are killing each other during the partition of India and the activist Vinayak Savarkar and his followers (who believe in assassination)?

WATCHING THE FILM—about 57 min.

**DELVING DEEPER—IN A THIRD CLASS AFTER VIEWING THE FILM;
CHOOSE one or more activities (up to 55 min.)**

1) DISCUSSION WITH ENTIRE CLASS ACTIVITY (10-15 min.):

Questions: At the start of **GANDHI'S GIFT**, Gandhi is released from 21 months in prison at the age of 74. Why do you think he is at such a low point in his life? How did he recover? After he leaves prison, what is the major cause of his sadness? How did he cope? Mahatma Gandhi is considered one of the greatest political figures who ever lived and the most beloved. Have you ever thought about a great world leader being depressed or despairing over what was happening in his life and country? Do you admire Gandhi for continuing to work for peace and unity despite his own sadness and disappointment?

2) DISCUSSION WITH RESEARCH ACTIVITY (20-30 min.)

First, ask someone to write this on the board: “I feel in the inmost recesses of my heart that the world is sick unto death of blood spilling. The world is seeking a way out and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be a privilege of the ancient land of India to show that way out to the hungering world.” This is the first statement made by Gandhi in **GANDHI'S GIFT** (1944-48). He made it in 1931.

Research: Before discussing these questions, ask students to research the years of WWI (1914-18), methods of combat and how many were killed. Ask them to research examples/evidence of people making war and conflict today or people “seeking a way out” today.

Discussion: How do you think WWI may have affected what Gandhi said about the world being “sick unto death of blood-spilling”? Do you feel as he did that the world today “is seeking a way out” of blood-spilling or violence? Use examples to support your claim either way. Is a nonviolent or peaceful world possible?

3) SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITY (20 min.) WITH ENTIRE CLASS DISCUSSION ACTIVITY (10 min. for a total of 30 min.):

Have students get into small groups to discuss ONE of the following two discussion topics before reporting to the class.

Topic 1: During Gandhi’s dramatic grass-roots pilgrimage for peace, called “The Miracle of Noakhali,” Gandhi says this to the villagers who have been injuring and killing others as well as to those who have been terrorized by the violence: “The more I go about in these parts the more I find that your worst enemy is fear. The terrorist as well as the terrorized is equally its victim. It eats into their vitals. Unless you cultivate fearlessness, there will never be any peace in these parts for the Hindus or for the Muslims.”

First, what does Gandhi mean by “it (fear) eats into their vitals”? Do you agree with his statements about fear/fearlessness? Why or why not? Do you think our communities would be more peaceful if we were more fearless? Next, consider this: Some believe fear of “the other” is the cause of all hatred, prejudice and violence. . .do you agree? Commentator James Douglass mentions the types of fear that Indians experienced then (fear of the British Empire, fear of the white man, fear of the enemy and fear of members of “the other” religion). What are some of the fears we experience today? Finally, Douglass says, “Gandhi became fearless.” How was Gandhi fearless in the film? What does it mean to be fearless? Have you ever known a fearless person?

Topic 2: What were some of the consequences of Gandhi using nonviolence shown in the film? (Examples: his imprisonment after launching the “Quit India” campaign; his personal losses while in prison—his secretary, wife, health; his facing violence and people who didn’t want him there on his pilgrimage). Do you admire him for making such sacrifices for the greater good of his people? Although his “Quit India” campaign was strongly suppressed by the British within about two years, it was ultimately responsible for persuading the British to leave India after almost one century of rule. Do you think this outcome made his personal sacrifices, including giving his life, worth the sacrifices he (and many others, such as his wife who died in prison) made?

REFLECTING AND EXPRESSING THROUGH WRITING—ASSIGNMENT

1) Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, which may seem like a long time ago. His non-violent strategy has been adapted and used by scores of leaders of nonviolent movements in the 20th century, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S. and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. A) Write an essay describing examples of three movements or people who have used Gandhian nonviolent techniques. B) Or write an essay expressing reasons why or why not you believe Gandhi’s nonviolent strategy is viable today. If you believe that his nonviolent strategy could be used successfully or should be used today, give examples of how it has been used in the past or could be used and in what circumstances.

2) In **GANDHI’S GIFT** we see an African American civil rights leader, William Stuart Nelson, visiting Gandhi on his peace pilgrimage to Noakhali in 1946-47 and learn that African American leaders were looking to India in the 30’s and 40’s for a way to combat “American apartheid.” (Define “apartheid”: in South Africa a policy or system of

segregation or discrimination on grounds of race.) Martin Luther King Jr. was a follower of Gandhian nonviolence, saying that Jesus Christ “furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method” for the civil rights movement he helped to launch in the U.S. King also made this statement: “If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. We may ignore him at our own risk.” Write an essay, explaining what you think King is saying here and arguing if you think King was right in saying it, why or why not? You might want to recount what King accomplished using Gandhian nonviolent means.

3) In **GANDHI'S GIFT**, Gandhi is depicted as meeting with refugees on a daily basis in Delhi before his death: Hindus and Sikhs who had fled their homes in what became East or West Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country, and Muslims who had fled or were considering whether to flee their homes in predominantly Hindu areas in India. Gandhi attempts to calm them and asks Muslims to remain in their homes and Hindus and Sikhs not to feel hatred against Muslims because they have had to leave their homes, but he is not entirely successful. In an essay, define “refugee” and contrast it with the definition of “immigrant.” Also, explain if a person seeking asylum is the same or different? Discuss which of these (refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers) are coming to America and why, researching their numbers. **OR:** Write an essay comparing the refugees in India during the time of partition with the refugees of today around the world. What were the number of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in India during 1947, the year of Indian independence and India’s partition. How many became refugees during that time? (Their mass migration is considered the largest in human history.) About how many refugees are there in the world today, where are they coming from and where are they going? Compare the primary reasons that they have become refugees with the reason(s) of the Indian refugees in 1947?

STANDARDS

Students will be able to achieve the national standards listed below.

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.6-8.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade 6-8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.6.2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.6.3. Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.6.4. Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2. Psy.2.6-8. Investigate human behavior from biological, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2. His. 3. 6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Geography State Standards. D2.Geo.2.6-8. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions, and changes in their environmental characteristics.