

LESSON PLAN #1: NONVIOLENCE

For Students in Grades 9-12

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, *Satyagraha*** (Sanskrit for “holding onto the truth”). Gandhi allowed it to be translated into English as “Truth-Force” (or “Soul-Force” or “Love-Force”). 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.

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

**Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and The Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 112-114, p. 121).

**Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 54-58.

** How to pronounce *Satyagraha*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfGrbH4y9PM> .

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 his legacy in Indian and world history.
- Learn about the geography and history of India.
- Analyze Gandhi’s use of nonviolent methods to achieve independence and fight injustice and hatred.
- Compare how Gandhi’s methods differ from others’ methods.
- Learn about the historical connection between Gandhi and the early U.S. civil rights movement.
- Analyze the phenomenon of interreligious conflict and violence.

Estimated Time Required: Four classes (two partial in preparation for film; one to watch the film; one to discuss the film)

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). You might read them the **Film Summary** (Page 1).

RESEARCH HOMEWORK BEFORE VIEWING FILM:

- a) Ask students to 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 Pakistan.
- d) Compare sizes of India and Great Britain in 1944, also populations.
- e) Research: when did Britain begin to rule India? (1858)
- f) What was the East India Trading Company and its role in India?
- g) You might ask students to 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 (10-20 min.)

Have students report their research. If you have not studied "colonialism," go over it now. If you have, ask for a definition 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—AFTER VIEWING THE FILM; CHOOSE one or more activities (50-55 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 hungry 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 (15 min.) WITH ENTIRE CLASS DISCUSSION ACTIVITY (10 min. for a total of 25 min.):

Have students get into small groups to discuss ONE of the following four 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: Having watched **GANDHI’S GIFT**, mention examples of Gandhi’s use of nonviolence to fight oppression and religious hatred. Define nonviolence as he illustrated it. How does his nonviolent methods differ from those who were killing each other because of the partition of India and religious hatred? Why would you guess the people killing others of a different religion might be fearful? How do Gandhi’s philosophy and strategies differ from that of Vinayak Savakar and his followers (SEE BELOW), who killed Gandhi? Why might they have been fearful enough of Gandhi to kill him?

Introduction of Savarkar in film (6:57-9:02):

Narrator: “Not in prison was Vinayak Savarkar. Gandhi met him in the early 1900’s at a London residence for radicalized Indian students (India House). Both were scheduled to speak. Gandhi espoused the power of nonviolence to change the heart of the enemy. Savarkar spoke of assassination as the path to independence. In a shed behind the house, he and his followers collected weapons and made bombs. Alarmed, Gandhi devoted sections of his classic book *Hind Swaraj* to answering Savarkar.” Gandhi: “You want to make the holy land of India unholy. Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassinations? It is a cowardly thought, that of killing others. Whom do you suppose to free by assassination? The millions of India do not desire it. Those who are intoxicated by the wretched modern civilization think these things.” Narrator: He (Savarkar) became the spokesperson and resident philosopher for the Mahasabha, an assembly of orthodox Hindus, and he turned his ire upon the Muslims. He urged young Hindus to enlist in WWII and learn the art of killing necessary to disempower the Muslims of India.”

Topic 3: 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?

Additional Film Topic 4: Think about **GANDHI'S GIFT** as a documentary in comparison with a feature film. Have you seen the feature film “*Gandhi*” (1982) by Richard Attenborough, winner of eight Academy Awards? Or have you seen Steven Spielberg’s “*Lincoln*,” (2012) which showed the subject’s last years before his assassination as **GANDHI'S GIFT** does? What techniques can be used in a documentary like **GANDHI'S GIFT** that are not used or rarely used in features films? (Examples: commentary by experts, an actor voicing Gandhi’s statements off screen, narration, black and white photographs and archival footage, etc.) Which of these techniques did you find particularly effective in making Gandhi “come alive” for you? Why? What techniques in the feature “*Gandhi*,” “*Lincoln*” or another biographical feature were particularly effective to you?

REFLECTING AND EXPRESSING THROUGH WRITING

1) Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, which may seem like a long time ago. His non-violent methods have 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. **OR:** B) 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, arguing for or against this statement. First, discuss what you think King is saying here. Also, discuss your reaction to his statement? Do you think King was right, and why or why not? You might want to recount what King accomplished using Gandhian nonviolent means.

3) Research and write about the partition of India, which took place in 1947. Who

decided on the partition and why? Who performed the partition and decided on which areas would remain in India and which areas would become the new country of Pakistan? What parts of India were affected by partition? How many people were affected and how many displaced as a result? Describe the other consequences of partition, especially how many people were killed. Finally, analyze the results and state if you think the partition was worthwhile and why or why not.

4) Use **the Additional Film Discussion Topic 4** as basis for an essay.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING LIST FOR STUDENTS GRADES 9-12

Fischer, Louis. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Harper, 1950.

Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. "On Civil Disobedience" (July 27, 1916), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

----- . *The Story of My Experiments with Truth: The Autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi*, Navajivan Press, 1927.

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters: An Appraisal of the Mahatma's Legacy*, Aleph Book Company, 2017.

King, Martin Luther King, Jr. "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," King Papers, Stanford University, July 1959, 5:231-8.

----- . "Statement Upon Return from India," King Papers, Stanford University, 18 March 1959, 5:142-3.

----- . James Melvin Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*, HarperCollins, 1986.

Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience" in *Collected Essays and Poems*, Library of America, 2001.

STANDARDS

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

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 (or 11-12) topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2. Psy.2.9-12. Investigate human behavior from biological, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2. His. 3. 9-12. 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.

CCSS Reading Standard for History/Social Studies. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH11-12.9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH11-12.8. Evaluate an author's premises, claims and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Geography State Standards. D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions, and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.