



Mohandas Gandhi: The Art of Nonviolence

Guide for Curriculum Unit 98.03.05
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This curriculum unit is intended for use in high school World History classes, but it can be adapted and used by teachers of United States history or Contemporary Issues when studying civil rights themes. Gandhi's reliance on nonviolent resistance to achieve political ends links his movement directly with that of Martin Luther King during the civil rights era of the 1960's. What can we learn from Gandhi the public servant, Gandhi the private person and Gandhi the philosopher? My teaching unit attempts to challenge students to confront a unique person with a unique lifestyle and a compelling message, "How can those without power, gain fair treatment from those in power?"

A teacher who decides to utilize this unit should be able to acquaint students with the root causes of cultural and racial discrimination and how people in various times and places have responded to being victimized by unfair treatment. They will realize that throughout history, past practices of discrimination and segregation leave wounds that may take generations to heal. "Coloreds" in South Africa, "Untouchables" in India, and "Negroes" in the American South were all at one time victims of legal and economic discrimination that have significant implications in the present day. What do individuals and societies affected by a legacy of unfairness do to ameliorate the resentments and hatreds of the past? Is reconciliation possible? What about those individuals who seem determined to continue a legacy of hatred and oppression? Are we ever guilty of buying into the idea that "all men are equal but some are more equal than others?"

Activities in this unit are designed to help the student understand what personal qualities and abilities Gandhi had that enabled him to inspire his people to be willing to sacrifice now in order to attain a dream in the future. How can dreams become reality? Students who pay attention to the lessons to be learned from the life and struggles of Mohandas Gandhi should gain some valuable lessons in achieving their own goals.

I designed the unit to help students learn how Gandhi's personal philosophy developed over time. How did his early experiences growing up in a liberal Hindu middle class home affect his thinking? How did his life in England as a law student influence his ideas? What ideas from books, such as the Bhagavad-Gita, the New Testament, Thoreau's Civil Disobedience, and Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God is Within You, influenced him in developing a consistent "world view"? How did he develop the important ideas of "truth force" (satyagraha) and civil resistance (ahimsa)? How important was the concept of forgiveness to Gandhi? Students should see that part of the power of Gandhi's leadership came from his commitment to action that was consistent with his words. Much of his credibility as a leader came from his ability to lead by example, something he learned from personal experience.

A major part of this unit is based on film segments from the Academy-award winning film, "Gandhi." In the Lesson Plan Section, there are detailed instructions how to best make use of the film, which is broken into four parts for classroom purposes, and includes a Study Guide for students. Another major part of this unit is devoted to the spinning wheel. Home spinning was a vital part of Gandhi's program to end British rule in India and raise people's consciousness of community. Students will learn how spinning wheels operate, a brief history of spinning and learn how to carefully observe an object or artifact, in this case an ancient spinning wheel, using Professor Jules Prown's methods of analysis.

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