Introduction

Many people and organizations involved in the African-American freedom struggle, including Martin Luther King, Jr., were influenced by the concept of nonviolence. This ideology was advocated and practiced by Mohandas K. Gandhi, one of the leaders of the Indian struggle for independence from British colonial rule.

In Part One of this unit, students will explore Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy and practice of ‘satyagraha’ (‘truth-force’ or ‘love-force’), the application of nonviolence to fight injustice.

In Part Two, students will compare Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ideas of nonviolence with those of Gandhi, who greatly influenced King. Students will also learn of the different people and organizations that shaped King’s conception of nonviolence and introduced the nonviolent direct action tactics used in the African-American freedom struggle.
In Part Three, students will explore what it means to carry on Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolence in today’s world. Students will identify people and organizations that embody nonviolent philosophy and developing tactics of nonviolent direct action they can use to combat injustice in the world.

Note: In this unit, we have chosen to use ‘nonviolent direct action’ to describe the use of nonviolent tactics to fight injustice because of the active nature of the term ‘direct action.’ Students may come across different terms in readings and other resources for the use of nonviolence to fight injustice.

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**Essential Question**

How did nonviolent philosophy and practice influence the Indian and African American freedom struggles?

**Sub Questions**

- What were Gandhi’s core ideas on nonviolence?
- How was nonviolent philosophy put into practice in events of the Indian freedom struggle? What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used?
- What were King’s core ideas on nonviolence? What was the relationship between King and Gandhi’s ideas on nonviolence?
- Who were the people and organizations that influenced King’s ideas on nonviolence and introduced Gandhian nonviolent philosophy and practice into the African American freedom struggle of the 50s and 60s?
- How was nonviolent philosophy put into practice in events of the African-American freedom struggle? What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used?
- What were some of the similarities and differences between the use of nonviolent direct action in the Indian and African American struggles?
- How are nonviolent direct action tactics adapted to suit particular situations and issues?
• What are the attributes, thoughts, and actions of a nonviolent person in today’s world?

• Who are some of the people and organizations engaged in Gandhian nonviolence today?

• What are some ways in which students can continue the tradition of nonviolent direct action in their community?

Lesson Activities

Part One: Gandhian Nonviolence in the Indian Freedom Struggle
Part Two: Gandhian Nonviolence in the African-American Freedom Struggle
Part Three: Continuing the Legacy of Nonviolence

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Part One: Gandhian Nonviolence in the Indian Freedom Struggle

Gandhi during the Salt March, March-April 1930.

Instructions

1. Opening Activity: Ask students to work with a partner to identify a recent violent event that took place in their community, in the nation or the world. Encourage students to draw from their knowledge of current events. You can also circulate local or national news as a resource.
2. Introduce students to Mohandas K. Gandhi, his life, activism, and achievements. Depending on the knowledge level about Gandhi, refer to the King Encyclopedia article about Mohandas K. Gandhi.

3. What would Gandhi say? Hand out the worksheet containing Mohandas K. Gandhi’s quotes, Handout A. Working in pairs, students read through the quotes and choose two that express ‘what Gandhi would say’ in response to the recent violent event they identified. Students then make a short presentation to the class describing the event, sharing their chosen quotes, and illustrating how the quotes are an appropriate expression of what Gandhi might say in response to the event.

4. Students choose a quote in Handout A and write a short reflection applying it to their own lives. Some questions to consider: Is the quote still relevant today? Do you agree or disagree with the view expressed in this quote? Why or why not? Describe how the quote applies to an aspect of your life.

5. Explain to students that Gandhi called the use of nonviolence to fight injustice ‘satyagraha,’ which means ‘truth-force’ or ‘love-force.’ It can also be called nonviolent direct action. List on the board the following Nine Steps taken (not necessarily in order) in a satyagraha or nonviolent direct action campaign. Explain the steps to your class and give examples.

   1. **Investigation**: Determining the actual grievance or unjust situation,
   2. **Negotiation and arbitration**: Trying established channels to resolve the conflict,
   3. **Preparation of group for direct action**: Examples: Raising awareness, planning strategy, training,
   4. **Agitation**: Examples: Meetings, marches, demonstrations,
   5. **Issuing an ultimatum**: A final appeal to the opponent that offers the widest scope for agreement, presents a constructive solution, and details next the steps, if an agreement is not reached.
   6. **Nonviolent direct action**: Examples: Sit-ins, strikes, economic boycotts,
   7. **Noncooperation**: Examples: Not complying with functions of government or public institutions,
8. **Civil disobedience**: Disobeying unjust laws central to the issue at hand,

9. **Parallel government**: Taking over government functions.

Note: These steps have been adapted from Joan Bondurant’s *Conquest of Violence*, *Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* and from the memo *The Meaning of the Sit-Ins* from Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), dated 1 August, 1960.

6. Students watch the film *India: Defying the Crown* on the 1930-31 Salt Satyagraha in India. Using the nine steps listed above as a guideline, students note relevant tactics used in the campaign. Pause the film periodically to allow students to take notes. Discussion Questions:

- Which were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used in the Salt Satyagraha? Which of the steps would they fall under?

- What influence did Gandhi have on the masses in India? How did Gandhi’s influence contribute to undermining the British Empire?

- Why did Gandhi accept Viceroy Lord Irwin’s compromise? Do you think he should have accepted? What do you think might have happened if he refused to accept it?

- How did Gandhi’s leadership and the participation of ordinary people both contribute to the success of the Salt Satyagraha? Were these factors equally significant in the campaign? Why or why not?

7. Human Barometer: Students read **Handout B: 1920-22 Non-Cooperation Campaign** for information on the 1920-22 nationwide non-cooperation campaign Gandhi conducted, and write a response to the prompt on the handout. Ask students: “Do you believe Gandhi called off the movement because of the violent Chauri Chaura incident?” Students imagine a line drawn along the entire front wall of the classroom or create a line using tape, with one end designated as ‘do not believe’ and the other as ‘believe’. Students stand at the spot that aligns with whether they believe that Gandhi called off the movement or not. Students who are ambivalent can choose to stand in the middle or slightly skewed towards either end. Drawing on what they know about Gandhi’s philosophy and the Indian struggle so far, students articulate why they agree, disagree, or are unsure of Gandhi’s decision, based on their written response in the handout. When students return to their seats, inform them that Gandhi chose to call off the campaign.
Discussion Questions:

- Are you surprised at Gandhi's choice? Why or why not?
  In response to this incident, Gandhi said: "the tragedy of Chauri Chaura is really
  the index finger. It shows the way India may easily go if drastic precautions be
  not taken...Suspension of mass civil disobedience and subsidence of excitement
  are necessary for further progress, indeed indispensable to prevent further
  retrogression." Do you agree or disagree with his reasons? Why or why not?

Note: The quote above was taken from Gandhi’s article ‘The Crime of Chauri Chaura.’ If
you choose to assign the whole article for reading in your class, it is available in Dennis
Dalton’s Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings on pages 32-34.

Materials

- Current local and national newspapers
- Handout A: What would Gandhi say?
  26 min; click on the second/lower picture) https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/
  force-powerful-english
- Handout B: 1920-22 Non Co-operation Campaign

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1Dalton, Dennis. ed. Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings, Indianapolis, Indiana:
Part Two: Gandhian Nonviolence in the African-American Freedom Struggle

1. Opening Activity: Cut out the quotes in Handout C *King and Gandhi Quotes* and hand each student a strip of paper with either a Gandhi or a King quote. Students walk around the room and interact with each other till those with King quotes find those with Gandhi quotes that are similar in theme/content to their own, and vice versa. Partners read their quotes out loud to the class, explain the quotes in their own words, and discuss how they are similar in theme or content. After students have heard all the quotes, ask them if any King quotes seemed to contradict any Gandhi quotes in their essence. Discuss the differences or contradictions that the students noticed.

2. Use the chart in Handout D: *How Nonviolence Entered the African-American Freedom Struggle* to illustrate the various people and organizations that practiced nonviolent direct action in the African-American freedom struggle. Explain their role in introducing Gandhian nonviolent philosophy to the U.S. Some of the relationships that facilitated the transfer of Gandhian ideas are underlined in the text. More information on these people and organizations can be found in The King Encyclopedia.

3. Students watch the film Nashville: “We Were Warriors” on the Nashville student sit-in movement in 1960, thirty years after the Salt Satyagraha in India. Using the nine steps listed in Part One as a guide, students note relevant tactics used in the campaign. Pause the film periodically to allow students to take notes. Discussion Questions:

   - What were some of the nonviolent direct action/tactics used in the Nashville student sit-ins? Which of the steps would they fall under?
• Was King involved in the Nashville sit-ins? What role did ordinary people play in this campaign? Explain the meaning and importance of grassroots participation and its role in nonviolent movements.

• Imagine you are one of the students participating in the sit-ins. What Gandhi quote(s) (from the list in Handout A: Quotes) would you choose to describe the philosophy behind your campaign?

4. Students work with partners to identify at least two similarities and two differences in tactics used in the Salt Satyagraha and Nashville campaigns. Students participate in a class discussion comparing the two campaigns.

5. **Homework Activity:**
Students write a response to the following statement:
Drawing from the two films you have watched, compare and discuss the role of one of the following factors in the Salt Satyagraha and Nashville campaigns: media, laws/legal help, the tactic of jail-going, or top-down leadership vs. grassroots participation.

6. **Extension Activity:** The Salt Satyagraha and the Nashville sit-ins are only two of many nonviolent direct action campaigns in the Indian and African-American freedom struggles, respectively. Using other events in these freedom struggles, e.g. the 1922 Non Cooperation movement (India), the 1942 Quit India movement (India), the Montgomery Bus Boycott (US), and the Selma to Montgomery March (US), compare and contrast among other nonviolent campaigns. Compare the roles of Gandhi and King to the participation of ordinary citizens at the grassroots level.

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Part Three: Continuing the Legacy of Nonviolence

Organizations dedicated to Nonviolence

Instructions

1. Give students about 5 minutes to answer and elaborate on the following question: To what extent are Gandhi’s ideas of nonviolence realistic in today’s world? Students are encouraged to think at local, national, and global levels. Students share responses with the class. Using Gandhi’s ideas as a starting place, discuss with students the qualities, thoughts, and actions of a nonviolent person in today’s world. Make a list of the attributes your students come up with on butcher paper and tape this list to the classroom wall.

2. Students identify a person in their community or an organization that they believe is carrying on Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolence. Students may need the teacher’s help with this task. Those students who chose a community member as an example will interview their subject about how they incorporate nonviolent philosophy in their work and life. The ‘Great Questions’ list at the Story Corps’ website is an excellent resource for generating interview questions. Those students who chose an organization will visit its website to identify examples of nonviolent philosophy in its work. Students should consider core ideas and beliefs as well as tactics of nonviolent direct action informing the organization’s work. The mission statement section of the websites are good places to start. Students write an essay on the following prompt:

- How does the person you interviewed or the organization you researched carry on Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolence? Use at least two Gandhi quotes to make your case.
Options: Teachers can tailor this activity to the needs and interests of their classroom. If students choose local organizations to research, they can interview people working there. If students are interested in the continuation of Gandhi’s legacy in his birth country, India, they can select to research Indian organizations. Some examples are:

- Sahr Waru, Women’s Action and Resource Unit, (sahrwaruindia.org),
- Manav Sadhna (http://www.manavsadhna.org),
- Pratham (http://www.pratham.org),
- Childline India (http://www.childlineindia.org.in),
- C.R.Y. (Child Relief and You), India (http://www.cry.org/index.html), among many others.

Inform students that Gandhi was concerned about many issues such as education, uplifting women, communal and religious harmony, rural industry development, sanitation, and economic equality.

3. Students work in small groups of 3-4 to choose an injustice at the local, national, or global level. Encourage students to select issues of personal relevance or concern to them. Using the nine steps outlined in Part One as a guideline, students develop and write out a sequence of actions that can be taken to address the injustice, as if planning a nonviolent direct action campaign.

4. **Extension Activity**: Interested students can work with their schools, communities, or local organizations to put these steps they developed into practice against their chosen injustice. Refer students to the Albert Einstein’s Institute’s ‘198 Methods of Nonviolent Action’ (https://www.aeinstein.org/) to identify possible nonviolent actions they can take against injustice. Here are some additional suggestions for activities: lunch hour teach-ins, ‘Day of nonviolence,’ and honoring community members who carry on Gandhi’s legacy.

**Additional Resources:**