

THE SINGING REVOLUTION



Subjects: History / English Language Arts

Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Estonia: Lessons in Non-Violence

Aim / Essential Question

How does Estonia's non-violent movement compare and contrast with others?

Overview

Most high school students are familiar with Martin Luther King's non-violent civil rights movement in the 1960s, as well as Mohandas Gandhi's earlier non-violent movement that influenced Martin Luther King. But how many students are familiar with Estonia's non-violent movement? The documentary film *The Singing Revolution* offers a fascinating look at a lesser-known non-violent movement.

Materials & Technology

- *The Singing Revolution* (Chapter 1, and Chapters 5-9)
(from Disc One / Chapters)
- Class set of handouts
(below)
- Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
- A television or video projection unit

Lesson Time: Two 50-minute class periods.

Objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast the non-violent movements of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Estonian people.
- Analyze the effectiveness of non-violence in achieving one's goal.
- Hypothesize about the relationship between Martin Luther King's teachings on non-violence, those of Mohandas Gandhi, and the non-violent movement in Estonia.

Instruction

Day 1

Opening: Bell Ringer / Do Now

When you think about non-violent protests, what names come to mind? Why? What do you know about any of the leaders who advocated non-violence?

Or-

Write the following quotations on the board:

"An unjust law is itself a species of violence. Arrest for its breach is more so." –Mohandas Gandhi

"Hate begets hate. Violence begets violence..." –Martin Luther King, Jr.

Have students write these quotes in their notebooks. What is the significance or meaning of the quotes? Give them a few minutes to write their answers, and then call on several students to answer the questions.

Activities

1. Distribute handout.
2. Have students independently read the section on Mohandas Gandhi, or read it as a class.
3. Give the students a few minutes to answer the questions.
4. Go over the questions with the students.
5. Then have students read the section on Martin Luther King, or read it as a class.
6. Again give the students a few minutes to answer the questions.
7. Go over the questions with the students.
8. Show chapter one (8:45) of *The Singing Revolution*.
9. Have students answer the first question on the worksheet on *The Singing Revolution*.

Day 2

10. Have students take out their worksheets on *The Singing Revolution*, and instruct them to complete the worksheet as they watch the clips.
11. Show chapters five through nine of *The Singing Revolution*. These five chapters take approximately 50 minutes.

Close: Application / Summary

How did Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Estonians demonstrate non-violence in their methods?

Homework

Assignment #1

Have students write about ways to incorporate non-violent principles into their own lives, -for example, to remove violent practices, (addiction, discrimination, physical or emotional abuse of siblings or parents), to prevent violent practices from taking hold, (religious fundamentalism), or to encourage existing non-violent practices, (promoting compassion, volunteerism).

Assignment #2

Have students explain how Tunne Kelam's quote is similar to Mohandas Gandhi's quote.

"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." –Mohandas Gandhi

"Our present has been centered around one single theme—how to restore our national and political independence. ...that national independence is the only way to help our people rise out of colonial dependence and to insure our political, economic and cultural sovereignty. National independence is the basis and precondition for all normal and genuine development — it is the only way for us."

–Tunne Kelam, Estonian Independence Day Speech, 1989

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Mohandas Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi preached and practiced *Satyagraha*. Its meaning, he wrote, is holding on to truth, hence truth-force, or Soul-force. "In the application of *Satyagraha*," Gandhi wrote, "I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self."

"But on the political field the struggle on behalf of the people mostly consists in opposing error in the shape of unjust laws. When you have failed to bring the error home to the lawgiver by way of petitions and the like, the only remedy open to you, if you do not wish to submit to error, is to compel him by physical force to yield to you or by suffering in your own person by inviting the penalty for the breach of the law. Hence *Satyagraha* largely appears to the public as Civil Disobedience or Civil Resistance. It is civil in the sense that it is not criminal."

The civil resister," wrote Gandhi, "ever obeys the laws of the State to which he belongs, not out of fear of the sanctions but because he considers them to be good for the welfare of society. But there come occasions, generally rare, when he considers certain laws to be so unjust as to render obedience to them a dishonor. He then openly and civilly breaks them and quietly suffers the penalty.... And in order to register his protest against the action of the law givers, it is open to him to withdraw his co-operation from the State by disobeying such other laws whose breach does not involve moral turpitude [acts of vileness or depravity]."

Gandhi supported independence for India and told his followers to do what they could to make life difficult for their British rulers. But he was insistent that they not use violence, even to defend themselves. Gandhi believed that violence was an unnecessary evil. Further, they would win support of others through their peaceful behavior. Terms commonly associated with Gandhi are "civil disobedience" and "passive resistance."

Gandhi's most famous campaign of civil disobedience was the Salt March. The British government had instituted a tax on salt that doubled the price of salt, a necessity. Indians were forbidden by law from making their own salt. In 1930, Gandhi led thousands of supporters more than 200 miles in a march to the sea. There, Gandhi and his followers used sea water to produce their own salt. Over 80,000 Indians would ultimately be jailed as they followed the lead of Gandhi and produced or attempted to produce their own salt.

There would be more such examples of *Satyagraha* used in India, and as there were, more of the world would look upon the British as unjust rulers...

Questions

7. According to Gandhi, what was the best way to oppose injustice?
8. When is it appropriate to break the law?
9. What do you suppose was the point of the Salt March?

Dr. Martin Luther King

"Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of *Satyagraha*...was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. ... It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking." – Martin Luther King

In April 1963, Martin Luther King penned his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," excerpted below:

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants--for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs.... As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise.... We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action... Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?"

Nonviolent direct action seeks to...foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters [from communism] did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Questions

1. What evidence is there that Martin Luther King was influenced by Mohandas Gandhi?
2. What was Martin Luther King working in support of?
3. How were Gandhi's goals different from King's goals? How were they similar?

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The Singing Revolution

Directions: As you watch the introduction to the documentary, answer the following question:

What was the basis of the dispute between Estonia and the Soviet Union?

Directions: As you watch the video segments, take notes on events that show Estonian support for non-violence in their dispute with the Soviet Union. There are numerous situations in the video segment that serve as examples.

1.

2.

3.

How might the Estonian struggle for independence have turned out differently had the Estonians resorted more to violence than to peace?
