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# CHAPTER 9

## EXPRESSIONS OF PEACE

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This chapter introduces students to the life and philosophy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), social activist, Indian nationalist, and revered teacher of the philosophy of non-violence. Born in India, educated in Britain, and forged in the racist crucible of South Africa, Gandhi was trained as a lawyer, but became famous as an activist for the oppressed. By the time of his death at an assassin's hands, his name had become synonymous with India's quest for independence from the colonial rule of Great Britain.

After completing this chapter, students should know the basic biographical outline of Gandhi's life, his major accomplishments, and the most important concepts associated with his philosophy. The goal of this chapter is to give students the basic information about Gandhi's life and work and to engage them in examining the values and beliefs that inspired Gandhi's life and work. The chapter will provide a template for the study of the lives of other men and women whose lives were dedicated to the pursuit of peace, freedom, and justice.



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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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#### Brief Biography of M. K. Gandhi, 1869-1948

Gandhi was born in an India when it was under the **colonial rule** of the British Empire; almost 80 years later, he died just months after India gained her independence from that Empire. Beloved and respected by millions all over the world, this teacher and leader had many names in his life: born Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1869, he was first called "Mahatma" ("Great Soul") in 1915 by a leading Indian poet. This honorary title suggested that he was a kind of god, something he absolutely denied. Among his followers, he was also known as Gandhi ('-ji' is an affectionate nickname) and Bapu ("Daddy").

Youngest son of a Hindu family of the merchant caste, Mohandas was married, in an arranged marriage typical of the times, to a local girl, Kasturba, a relationship which lasted until her death at the age of 74. Even as a boy, Mohandas was interested in religion and tried hard to follow local religious customs of diet and behavior. Sent to London to study law in 1888, Gandhi developed a deep respect for the British legal system; he did not know that he would spend much of his life fighting against the rule of Great Britain. He returned to India in 1891, but could not easily find work.

In 1893, he was offered a chance to work as a lawyer for an Indian firm in South Africa. Early in his stay there, Gandhi personally experienced hateful **racial discrimination**--he was thrown off a train and refused rooms at a hotel. These incidents opened his eyes to the reality of the South African system of **racial separation**. In 1894, when the government threatened to take away all voting rights from Indian citizens, Gandhi formed the Natal National Congress, a political group that worked for Indian rights.

Even though he disagreed with many things that the colonial government did, Gandhi remained loyal to Great Britain, and he, along with many Indian residents of South Africa, supported the British Army in the Boer War of 1899-1902. The British won that war and took over the government of the newly formed Union of South Africa. There were still many laws that restricted the rights of Indian and other non-white citizens, however, and Gandhi and his family stayed in South Africa for more than a decade, seeking to improve human rights under the British administration.

Gandhi worked to help the Indian community in many ways: In 1903 he started an Indian newspaper, and organized a farm where the newspaper employees would not only print the paper, but also live, grow food and work to support each other. In 1906 the government tried to make Indian residents carry identification cards. Gandhi led thousands of Indians in a

peaceful protest against this proposal. In this protest, and others that followed, Gandhi developed his ideas about **nonviolent resistance** to unfair laws and inspired many people to follow his example.

In 1914, Gandhi and his family moved back to India, where he continued working in two main areas: independence from Britain and human rights for all Indian citizens. He particularly tried to remove the worst injustices of the **caste system**, a traditional way of organizing society in which the lowest levels, the "Untouchables," were denied basic economic and social freedoms. To train people in his nonviolent methods, Gandhi started an **ashram**, a kind of religious study center, where everybody, including Untouchables, could come to live and work together, and study the principles of non-violence. People came from all over the world to live at this ashram. By 1918, Gandhi was leading Indian peasants in nonviolent protests. By 1920 he was active in a political organization that wanted to liberate India from the British Empire.

For the next 28 years, Gandhi continued to lead protests against unfair economic and political restrictions, fight for national independence and teach his followers to use peaceful and nonviolent methods to change society. Sometimes Gandhi would **fast** as a sign of protest; when he fasted, he would become very weak and sometimes come near to death. He was very beloved by the population of India; knowing that his death would cause great anger and violent riots among the people, the government often changed its policies or at least negotiated with Gandhi rather than let him die of hunger.

At other times Gandhi and his followers would make peaceful marches or simply refuse to cooperate with a law. Unfortunately, even these nonviolent methods often produced violence among the people he was trying to help, especially between Indian Hindus and Indian Moslems. Gandhi himself always tried to reach a peaceful conclusion, even if it meant **compromising** with his opponents, but some people hated the idea of compromise. Mahatma Gandhi lived to see Independence Day, when Britain finally left India on Aug 15, 1947. On January 30, 1948, he was **assassinated** by a Hindu **fanatic**, who was angry with him for negotiating with Muslims.

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## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

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This 60-minute lesson presents the life of Mahatma Gandhi to students through readings and related discussions. Gandhi's lifelong dedication to peace and non-violent methods of protest against racial discrimination and civil injustice makes the story of his life and his writing an important part of peace education. Language skills that are practiced in this chapter are reading for information, summarizing information, and presenting information from the reading to others in small group discussions. Activities for the lesson include developing a time-line of Gandhi's life and jigsaw readings that tell about different aspects of Gandhi's life and work. Teachers are encouraged to use other resources, such as the [Internet Resources](#) provided later in this chapter, to expand and adapt the readings for the level of proficiency of their classes. They are also encouraged to use the model provided in Chapter 9 for further work with the lives of other famous human rights and peace activists.



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## PRELIMINARY LESSON PLANNING

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### *Materials:*

- For the [Warm Up Activity](#), a picture of Gandhi and large poster paper is needed.
- For [Activity #1](#), make copies of the [Biography of Gandhi](#) for each student.
- For [Activity # 2](#), a jig-saw reading activity, make copies of each of the [three texts](#) about Gandhi's life and work for groups of students (i.e., each group will read a different text). If you have a large class, several groups may read the same text.



## WARM UP ACTIVITY

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**(approximately 10 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- To establish a base level of shared knowledge before beginning the readings
- To activate pre-existing knowledge as a pre-reading schematic device

*Materials:*

- A picture or poster of Gandhi
- Sheets of poster paper for recording students' ideas

*Procedures:*

Most students have probably heard of Gandhi and may have some general idea of who he was and why he is famous. To activate their existing knowledge and establish a baseline of knowledge within the class, conduct a brainstorming session:

1. Show the class a picture of Gandhi.
2. Ask students to tell the class something they already know about him. If students are hesitant to do this, the teacher may use these questions to stimulate contributions:
  - Do you know who this is?
  - What words would you use to describe this man?
  - How would you describe his clothing?
  - What part of the world does he seem to come from?
  - What emotions does this picture make you think of?
  - What words come to mind when you see this picture?
3. Without commenting on the accuracy or importance of the offered information, write each student's contribution on the board.
4. After most of the students have contributed some information, edit the written list as a group, sorting it into four shorter lists:
  - information that students are fairly sure is **true**,
  - items they are **not sure** of,
  - items which are clearly **opinions** rather than facts
  - items which are generally agreed to be **inaccurate** or untrue.

Discard the last list and keep the other three lists. During the editing, the teacher should feel free to use his or her own knowledge of Gandhi's life and ideology to help to assign the various items to the right list.

5. Post the lists on the wall or write on the board while the chapter is being studied.



## ACTIVITY #1

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**(Approximately 20 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- Reading and visualizing information
- To introduce students to the basic outlines of Gandhi's life and work; to present this information visually

*Materials needed:*

- Handouts of [Biography of Gandhi](#) for each student
- Large poster paper to make a time-line of Gandhi's life with the class

*Procedure:*

1. Have the students read the biographical text about Gandhi's life.
2. Ask the students to draw a timeline of Gandhi's life. If students have had little experience making timelines, do several citations with them and then have them finish on their own. When the students are finished, bring the class together and enter the significant dates of Gandhi's life on a timeline poster, e.g., birth, first political experience, return to India, first involvement in Indian politics, three major accomplishments, death. Display the information on the board or a poster while the students continue the lesson.



### **Transition Activity: Pre-reading questions**

**(Approximately 10 minutes)**

Now that the students are familiar with the basic outline of Gandhi's life, have them focus on more specific details by formulating questions. These questions can be elicited in various ways:

1. Return to the 3 lists from the [Warm Up Activity](#). Items from these lists can be turned into questions about Gandhi's life and times. These questions can be either written up for everyone to see or assigned to specific reading groups in [Activity #2](#).
2. Alternatively, the class can be asked to generate new questions, based on the timeline they have created.
3. Show the picture of Gandhi again, and have the students generate questions about it. The purpose of this step is to help students develop motivation for reading the more specialized texts assigned in Activity #2.



## ACTIVITY #2

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**(approximately 20 minutes)**

*Purpose:*

- To provide more information about Gandhi's life
- To practice of skill of reading for information

- To practice the skills of selecting and summarizing important information in writing

*Materials needed:*

Make copies of each of the three reading texts in [Appendix A](#) for four groups of students.

*Procedure: Jigsaw Reading in Reading Groups*

1. Divide the class into three groups and subdivide the texts among all the groups. Ask each group to read one of three different texts, each of which focuses on a different area of Gandhi's life and work. Texts in Appendix A and other sources such as websites, excerpts from reference books, biographies, and textbooks may be used.
2. Ask the students individually to select important information and to make notes as they read.
3. When students complete the reading and note taking, ask them to compare their notes about the text with a member of the same reading group.



## COOL DOWN ACTIVITY

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Ask students to complete the reading and note taking on their texts and to write a summary of the texts out of class to be presented in the next lesson.



## EXTENSIONS

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1. After making the timeline, for more details of Gandhi's life the students can look at more comprehensive timelines available at: <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/mahatma-gandhi-55.php>
2. If students are inexperienced in reading for information and note taking, make reading guides for each of the four texts that pose questions to be answered while reading. The completed reading guides serve as an outline for the important information in the text and facilitate the summary writing activity that follows the reading.
3. If students are experienced in reading for information, an alternative to note taking from the reading is to have them write questions about important points in the text. The questions will then serve as a guide for writing the summary that follows the reading task.



**Reading texts--Jigsaw Reading Activity**

**Group 1: Gandhi's Accomplishments**

Gandhi's life spanned nearly 80 years during which the world changed a lot. He lived to see Britain give up India, the "Crown Jewel" of its empire. He also lived long enough to become a world-famous teacher and leader. It was not his goal to become famous, but he did become known around the world, not only for leading millions of his followers in protests, fasts, marches, and strikes against the colonial rule, but also for providing education, literacy, job training, and spiritual leadership to all classes of Indian society.

For the first 20 years of his political activity, Gandhi tried to protect the civil and human rights of Indians in South Africa. The society of South Africa was strictly divided along lines of race and color; Indians had more freedoms and political power than black Africans but fewer rights than white Dutch or British citizens. Even after Britain won the Boer War, Gandhi had to fight for Indian rights; he founded the newspaper "Indian Opinion" in 1903, and led nonviolent protests against restrictions and penalties imposed upon the Indian community.

The second phase of his life's work was back in India. From 1914-1930, he fought for economic and political justice. He opened the Indian National Congress, a political organization that had mostly middle-class members, to all caste members and encouraged Muslims, a minority in India, to join. He organized and led national strikes against unjust laws and became an editor of "Young India," a political journal. He was elected president of the All India Home Rule League (an organization that wanted India to become independent of Britain) and spent several months in jail as punishment for his involvement in political and economic protests. He focused on the ways that Britain exploited India economically. In 1929 he was arrested for burning British-made textiles. He accused the British of stealing Indian cloth-making techniques and then moving jobs out of India to factories in Britain. In 1930, he led a march to the sea in order to protest the Salt Law, a law that said Indians were not allowed to make their own salt; they had to buy imported salt. With hundreds of his followers, Gandhi walked to the sea, and ate some salt from the beach; he was arrested but released a year later in a political compromise.

The third phase of his life started in the early 1930s, when he began to focus on injustices within Indian society itself. He worked to eliminate prejudice against the lowest caste, the "untouchables" and tried to educate Indians--many of whom resisted strongly--in universal civil rights. In 1932, he began a fast unto death to protest separate voting rights for untouchables: he wanted them to be allowed to vote in the general elections. He gave up the journal "Young India" and began to publish a journal called "Harijan" which means "Untouchable" in Hindi. Surviving more fasts in prison, where he was sent for his activity against segregation, and several assassination attempts in 1934, he established grass-roots associations of village industries, training villagers to make their own cloth and clothing. It was during this phase that he vowed never to wear anything but the simplest peasant clothing. As his fame spread, he again began to fight more strongly against the British presence in India. By 1942, he had helped Congress to pass the "Quit India" resolution, a strongly worded statement that told the British to leave India completely. To support this resolution, the 73-year-old leader began a final nationwide campaign of nonviolent resistance. He was arrested and began another fast unto death in prison. He survived the fast and prison, but during this detention his wife died.

Upon his release in 1944, he worked to creating an agreement between Hindus and Muslims. He opposed the division of India into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, but accepted it as a compromise. Emotions among Indians grew higher and higher, and even Gandhi's leadership could not prevent widespread violence. A Hindu fanatic who opposed all negotiations with Muslims assassinated him less than a year after Independence. Gandhi died in Delhi during a prayer meeting.



## Group 2: Historical and Political Context

It is hard to understand Gandhi's life if one does not have some idea of the world in which he lived. Gandhi spent much of his life fighting against a huge empire. The British Empire was immensely powerful and rich, and the colonies had complex economic and social relationships with the 'mother' country. It was common for middle-class and upper class Indian boys to be educated in English. At the same time, they faced racial discrimination when they went to England or other parts of the Empire. Gandhi was born in 1869, when the British Queen Victoria was at the height of her reign over the world's largest and richest empire. It was normal for Gandhi to be sent to London for his legal education, and normal as well for him to be offered work in another colony, South Africa. Both India and South Africa were colonies of Britain for nearly all of Gandhi's life. To complicated matters, South Africa was ruled partly by the British and partly by the Dutch. In fact, the Boer War (1899-1902) was fought between these two countries while Gandhi was living in South Africa. Britain won, and the newly unified Union of South Africa came under British rule. However, racial discrimination was not eliminated.

The British Empire controlled its colonies through legal, economic, and political methods. The British first came to India as traders. Gradually they took over most of the country, controlling not only the hugely profitable trade in tea, spices, textiles, and other important products, but also establishing a political system of British courts and governmental institutions, although local Indian nobles were allowed to keep some power. In India, the King or Queen had an official representative called a Viceroy. This person held the highest political office in the country, so often Gandhi had to negotiate with the Viceroy. Gandhi protested the injustice of some laws that Britain imposed on India, but he always believed in the basic fairness of the British legal system, maybe because he received his early legal training in England. This basic appreciation of Britain's laws made Gandhi more willing to trust and compromise with British administrators in India. It also made him angrier when those administrators, especially a Viceroy, treated him unfairly.

India was a particularly complicated country to rule, even under an independent Indian government, because of its system of castes. A person's life was strongly determined by the caste he or she was born into (Gandhi was born into a middle, merchant-caste), and the lowest castes suffered from deep prejudice and lack of opportunity. Therefore, when Gandhi tried to introduce the idea of civil rights and economic justice into Indian society, he always had to fight against the discrimination of the caste system. This is why his fight in favor of the lowest caste, the Untouchables, was so difficult. Not only the British colonial rulers but also Indian prejudice made Gandhi's task difficult. Still, through his method of compromise, non-violence, and acceptance of everyone's religion and status, Gandhi tried--and to a large extent succeeded--in getting all of India to work together against colonial rule. One of his techniques for uniting India against the British in the 1920s and 30s was to strengthen the activity of the Indian National Congress, a political organization that tried to supervise political and economic life in India even while Britain was still the ruling power. India was such a huge country; even though it had its own internal disagreements, the British knew that they had to take into account the power of such a large population. They were willing to pay attention to somebody like Gandhi, who could influence literally millions of followers.

Gandhi's fight for Indian independence was made even more difficult, however, by India's internal religious problems: there were constant problems between Indian Hindus (the majority) and Indian Muslims (a strong and loud minority). Each group mistrusted the other; many Muslims wanted to create a separate country, putting two pieces of India--at the northwest and the northeast--under Muslim rule. This country, originally called Pakistan, and now separated into Pakistan and Bangladesh, was something that Gandhi disapproved of: he wanted Indians to live together in peace and remain a unified nation. Gandhi tried to include everyone in his teaching. He preached the beauty of all religions, claiming that everyone who worked for social justice was a true child of God. However, in the end he compromised with the Muslim League, who strongly wanted their own country, and agreed that they could have Pakistan in order to support the larger goal of independence for India.





### Group 3: Gandhi's Lifestyle

Gandhi was very impressive as a leader because he truly lived according to the principles that he talked about in his speeches and his meetings. He was well known for wearing only simple clothing; in late middle age, he even promised publicly to wear only clothing that he made himself. He owned very few material possessions, and he tried to follow a vegetarian diet of simple food. For many years, he did not eat any animal products. During one of his later fasts, he nearly died, and a doctor convinced him to drink a little bit of goat's milk, but that was the only animal product he ate.

Gandhi got his ideas about how people should live mostly from his religion, Hinduism, which is practiced in many parts of the Indian sub-continent. Hindus do not eat beef and generally believe that it is wrong to kill animals for any purpose. However, Gandhi lived more strictly than most people, even religious people, in India. He was extremely non-materialistic and simple in his lifestyle. He was an example of someone who not only obeyed religious laws, but tried to do everything in his life with careful spiritual consideration and thought. As he wrote once, "Non-violence ... must begin at home."

But for Gandhi, it was not enough for an individual person to be nonviolent. He believed, in part because of his Hindu background, that all parts of life are related. Every part of a person's life affects every other part, and every individual person's life affects the lives of other people. He wanted his followers to be aware of how their activity contributed not only to their own lives, but also to the lives of the society. He extended his belief in non-violence even to the national level. He explained that "non-violence is not merely a personal virtue." In other words, he taught that nations as well as people should try to follow the path of non-violence. But when he believed that the reason for fighting was a good one, as in World War One, Gandhi supported it. He preferred, in his words, "violence over cowardice," and he understood that a flag was an important symbol for a nation, perhaps because he so strongly wanted independence for his own country.

Although his principles were nonviolent, his goal was active social and legal change. Gandhi always looked for ways in which he could actively resist unjust laws, and government policies. As he once wrote, "non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good." Even when violently attacked by policemen with deadly weapons, Gandhi and his followers peacefully continued violating what they saw as unfair laws, like burning immigrant registration cards, burning imported textiles, marching to the sea to gather local salt, and supporting striking workers. Most importantly, they did not try to fight back.

Where did Gandhi and his followers get the mental strength to survive physical attacks, prison life and long fasts? Gandhi got much of his strength from meditation and prayer. He felt that a society that was rich in prayer was more highly developed than one that was rich in material conveniences: "Civilization in the real sense of the term consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction, of wants."

Was Gandhi a saint? He denied it often, and he said that he did not like the semi-religious name of "Mahatma" that had been given to him by Tagore, a famous Indian poet who admired him. But he certainly lived his life with great dedication to his principles, and he died with the name of his Lord--Rama--on his lips. He is still loved, studied and remembered by millions of followers in India and around the world. There is no doubt that his life--simple but fearless--changed the world forever.

[\(back to Classroom Activities\)](#)

[\(back to Preliminary Lesson Planning\)](#)

[\(back to Activity #2\)](#)

