

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: NONVIOLENCE

ideas for
teachers
who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts
into what
and how
they teach

Winter I
2002

The students who engaged in the sit-ins at lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee during the campaign for civil rights in the South carried with them a list of "dos and don'ts" to guide their actions. Knowing that by breaking the law of the time they would be risking arrest and possible physical abuse, the list reminded students that theirs was a non-violent struggle. The last "DO" statement of the list was "5. Remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King." The memories of those peacemakers helped guide the students' actions and gave them strength to accept the abuse they would receive without turning their pain into anger, fear or hate of those who supported a segregated society.¹

During the Presidential campaign in 2000, George W. Bush stated that the figure he most looked to for guidance was Jesus. The birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. is celebrated as a national holiday, and students across the country study his life and teachings every year; many cities have renamed streets in his honor. Many other important peacemakers are regularly studied in schools, including César Chávez, Sojourner Truth, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, and the list go on.

A study of the four major television networks during the Persian Gulf War, however, found that of the 738 interviews held with experts analyzing the conduct of the war, only one of those interviews was with a peace group opposed to the war; media coverage today does not appear to be much different.² Plans for the current war in Afghanistan, for example, were drawn up just four days after the September 11 attacks. Where are the peacemakers? Are their messages of love and nonviolence irrelevant today? Are there really no alternatives to violence to eliminate the threat of more violence in this country and abroad?

Author Wendell Berry wrote, "In the face of conflict, the peaceable person may find several solutions, the violent person only one."³ The next two editions of *With Eyes to See* will explore what it means to be a peaceable person, and what we can do to create a world of less violence. This edition will explore alternatives to violence for resolving conflict; the following edition, due out in the Spring, will focus on learning more about people different than ourselves, including looking at the world and recent events with a discerning eye and through a lens of nonviolence.

(1. *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, by Peter Acherman and Jack Duvall, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2000; 2. "Pacifism remains a worthy alternative," by Colman McCarthy, *National Catholic Reporter*, November 16, 2001; 3. "Peaceableness Toward Enemies," by Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1991.)

"Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary."
-Mahatma K. Gandhi

"I would say that I'm a nonviolent soldier. In place of weapons of violence, you have to use your mind, your heart, your sense of humor, every faculty available to you. . . because no one has the right to take the life of another human being."
-Joan Baez

K-8

Fairy Tales and Conflict Resolution

The following exercise is based on the handbook "Once upon a conflict: A fairy tale manual of conflict resolution for all ages" (available for loan from Concern America).

1. Choose a fairy tale familiar to the students, rewriting it as told by the main characters/groups involved in the story. For example, "Goldielocks and the Three Bears" is retold from the viewpoint of Goldielocks, a hungry girl who had run away from an abusive home and is wandering and looking for food, and the Bears, a hardworking family who finds there has been an intruder in their house; "Little Red Riding Hood" is still about a young girl delivering food to her grandmother's house, but the wolf is hungry because its habitat has been decimated by housing developments. Be creative!

2. Divide students into equal groups, each reading a side of the story. The groups can then come together to do role plays, have a mediated discussion on resolving the conflict, and/or learn about parallels to current events. A simplified problem solving technique uses four questions to reach resolution: a) What is the problem? What has happened?; b) How do you feel about it?; c) What would you like to happen?; and, d) What could actually be done?.

A clever children's story that mirrors this retelling of fairy tales is the "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs," by Jon Scieszka, told by the wolf who only went to the pigs' houses to get a cup of sugar, and they misunderstood his intentions.

A-12

How Was the Fight?

In order to rethink how they have handled conflict in the past, students are asked to think back to a recent conflict in which they were involved, and answer the following questions on their own:

- Describe the conflict in 2-3 sentences.
- What did you want to achieve/win from the conflict? The other party?
- Describe the outcome and the methods used to solve the conflict.
- How did you feel afterwards?
- Were you satisfied with the outcome?

Then in small groups, the students share their conflicts and as a group consider the following questions, bringing their answers to the larger group:

- Was it difficult to think of the needs of the other person?
- Were you happy/unhappy with the outcome? Why?
- What methods were used to solve the conflict, and were there other ways it could have been resolved?

(Adapted from the Partners Companion to Training for Transformation, by Maureen Sheehy. Available for loan from Concern America.)

K-12

What is Non-Violence?

We must give the same status and prestige to the virtues and the means of peaceableness as we have heretofore given to the means of war. We should, for a start, establish a peace academy that would have the same prestige and standing as the military academies have.

-Wendell Berry

While we often spend time learning about peacemakers throughout history, many of us know little about nonviolence and pacifism. After studying nonviolence, students can be engaged in discussions about its relevance to the conflicts of today, including those of the their own lives. A good place to start for information is www.gandhiinstitute.org; for a compilation of speeches of MLK, visit www.stanford.edu/group/king. There are many books on both Gandhi and MLK. For older grades, try the powerful movie "Gandhi" (rated PG for some violence), or the moving video by PBS entitled "A Force More Powerful" which tells stories of nonviolent struggles around the world in the 20th century.

Teachers
K-12

Punishment Versus Proactive Nonviolence

When students break rules at school, we most often rely on the fear of punishment as a deterrent. To this, Gandhi said "punishment and disciplinary action might make for an outer show of orderliness and progress, but that is all." Take detention halls, for example, that tend to be filled with the same students each day. Yet, children learn from the actions of their elders, and if we act with violence towards them (even if it is "only" passive violence), Gandhi would contend, they learn to be violent: "the environment is we" he once said. In addition, when punishment is used, children tend to focus on how the punishment affects them, instead of how their behavior affects others. What to do?
 *Break old habits focused on punishment (raising ones voice, threatening detention, etc.);
 *Help students recognize and deconstruct the violence around them (teasing, bullying, TV, video games, etc.); *Focus on positive behaviors instead of singling out "troublemakers";
 *Teach peace, nonviolence, and character as much as the "three Rs."
 (Taken from the article "Punishment or Proactive Nonviolence: Challenges in the School Yard," from www.gandhiinstitute.org)

K-12

Conflict, Comics and TV Shows

Have students collect comics from the newspaper and/or keep logs on the TV shows they watch. The focus is on what conflicts they see and how they get resolved. *How do the characters relate to each other during the conflict? What tools do they use to solve problems? Are the solutions win-lose, a compromise, or win-win? What part did violence/non-violence play in the solutions?* This exercise attempts to have students learn more about how conflicts are solved, and to look at alternatives. For the older grades, this can lead to a discussion about the current war and whether there are less violent alternatives that have not yet been tried.

A related activity for younger grades takes advantage of the same stories the teacher already uses. After reading a book, the teacher can ask questions about the conflict, how each character acted, and what might each do different next time. In the "Three Billygoats Gruff," for example, the students might suggest that the goats invite the troll to their house for dinner, or help him find some food, or plant a garden with him, rather than having to trick him to save their own lives. Depending on the grade level, students can use puppets to reenact the stories, rewrite the stories in small groups, or stage plays with the same idea.

(Adapted from *So Everybody Fights* by Ita Sheehy, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, Blackrock, Ireland. Available for loan from Concern America.)

K-3

The Peace Table

The Peace Table is meant to help young children deal with conflicts nonviolently. The Table is placed near the teacher's desk, and is nicely decorated. At the beginning of the year, using puppets, the teacher does role plays with the students to model the use of the table, explaining that when students are having problems with each other ("she took my pencil," "he hit me," etc.), they can go to the Peace Table to work it out. Once there, each child takes a puppet and the puppets: 1) identify the problem, and 2) find ways for each child to be happy (solutions). Very soon, the children go to the Peace Table on their own without going to "tell the teacher," and not long after that, conflicts are often peacefully solved without even needing the Table. Children learn there are alternatives to resolving conflict, that through dialogue much can be solved, and that most conflicts are solved when we learn the "other's" point of view.

(Adapted from "Starting Small"; see Resources for book/video ordering information.)

"Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear; only love can do that. Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it."
 -MLK

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."
 -Steven Biko

RECOMMENDED

"Violence does even justice unjustly."
-Thomas Carlyle

"Peace is not the product of a victory or a command. It has no finishing line, no final deadline, no fixed definition of achievement. Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions."
-Oscar Arias

RESOURCES

- The Teaching Tolerance organization produces many good materials, many of which are free. One such resource is a book/video kit entitled "Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and Early Grades." For information, visit www.tolerance.org or call 334-956-8362.
- If you are interested in social justice education and school reform issues, an important resource is the quarterly "Rethinking Schools: An Urban Education Journal," put out by the Rethinking Schools organization. The most recent issue has a special insert on Teaching in the Aftermath of the September 11th Tragedy which is filled with thought provoking essays and teaching ideas. Visit www.rethinkingschools.org or call 800-669-4192 to receive a free catalog of their publications.
- A wonderful children's book, written and illustrated by many well known authors of children's books, is *The Big Book for Peace*, Dutton Children's Books, New York, 1990. It is a collection of stories and illustrations exploring the many faces of peace.
- More information on the video which explores nonviolence in the 20th century, "A Force More Powerful," can be found at www.pbs.org. The video can be purchased, but also try local libraries or peace organizations to find a copy for loan.

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, Brazil, Guinea and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- * the St. Nicholas Project
- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * school and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Information on any of these projects can be obtained by contacting:

Education Coordinator
Concern America
P.O. Box 1790
Santa Ana, CA 92702
(714) 953-8575

The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010, is upon us. Created by the United Nations, the Decade provides a great backdrop for peace and nonviolence activities in schools. For more information, including teaching ideas, links to related sites, lists of resources, and much more, visit www.unesco.org/iycp. The "Pledge for Peace" profiled in the Fall I, 2001 edition of *With Eyes to See* is one of Decade activities.

A U.S. Department of Peace? Representative Dennis Kucinich of Ohio has introduced H.R. 2459 in the House of Representatives, calling for the establishment of a U.S. Department of Peace, a federal agency headed by a Secretary of Peace, appointed by the President. The Department would be dedicated to promoting peace in the United States and abroad, and would work to develop policies which focus on the non-violent resolution of national and international conflict. Let your Representative know what you think about the proposed legislation.