

## Unit One: Understanding Violence and Nonviolence

### Lesson 1: Philosophy of Nonviolence

**Standards Addressed by Lesson:** **Reading and Writing Standard 4:** Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

**Objectives of Lesson:** Students explore the concepts of violence and nonviolence and understand the links between violence happening in their personal lives and conflict taking place on a global level. Students also see the connections between nonviolence personally and globally.

**Instructional Strategies:** Brainstorming, guided reading, group discussion

**Vocabulary:** Violence, nonviolence

**Suggested Resources to Obtain:** -*PeaceJam Teacher's Resource Guide*, PeaceJam  
- *Teaching Peace, A Guide for the Classroom and Everyday Life*, By Leah Wells, Santa Barbara: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2003.  
  
-*Delegation Pedagogy Manual*, Witness for Peace, 2000

**Suggested Time:** Between 50 and 60 minutes

**Materials Needed:** -Newsprint, markers  
-Copies of Article (from *Solutions to Violence*)

**Attachments:** A. Icebreaker  
B. Brainstorm responses on violence/nonviolence  
C. Some responses to lesson on interconnectedness activity  
D. Articles: "If We Listen Well" by Edward Guinan (*Solutions to Violence*, Colman McCarthy ed. Center for Teaching Peace)

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction to Lesson:

Define the course by explaining to students: The goal of this course is not to convince you of anything but to encourage you to think critically and truly reflect on the issues of violence and the possibilities of nonviolent choices, and the meaning and implications of both. The ideas of incessant war making and violence are so prevalent in our history and the current context of our

world that it is important to counter this with another reality and look to alternatives such as peace and nonviolence that ALSO make up a part of human history. If we want to work toward peaceful societies, we must teach peace. The literature on nonviolence is rich. If peace is what every government on earth says it seeks and if peace is the yearning of every heart, then why aren't we learning it in schools?

This is a student-centered, participatory course where your voice, input, suggestions, and comments are necessary to create a learning community. Although I am a facilitator of this experience, I am not an expert in the field and I am also here to learn about these issues through our readings, discussions, exercises, and activities.

This lesson begins with some questions, followed by a few activities that will encourage us to think about and discuss personal violence as well as violence experienced both locally and globally.

### **Icebreaker / Quick Activity to Assess Prior Learning:**

If this first lesson is part of a semester-long series, it is good to start off with some good vibes and positive energy with an activity that is fun and engages everyone! The following activity can take from 5 to 10 minutes.

Icebreaker Activity - I've Got Mail (see attachment A at end of lesson plan)

### **Setting up Class Norms:**

Before getting started with the class, create agreed upon norms the group feels should be followed throughout the semester. Using newsprint, brainstorm class norms. This newsprint may be kept and brought out to look at from time to time just to remind the group of some of "their" guidelines.

Some things the group may decide on are:

- Respect diverse opinions
- Don't interrupt when others speak
- Be on time to class
- Listen to others when they speak
- Reflect on the material being discussed
- Honesty
- Participate
- Have fun
- Be open to opinions that are different than your own; this is when the greatest learning can take place!
- Learn about oneself
- Be kind to others
- Treat each other fairly
- Practice what we are learning

- Be gentle when disagreeing with what is being said

If it hasn't been put up on the list remind students this is a student-centered class with participatory discussions and that they are also teachers. Let them know that your role is to teach as well as to facilitate.

## **Activities**

### **Activity 1:**

### **Examining Violence in Our Own Lives**

Begin the discussion by telling students it is important to take a look at violence and its impact on our own lives. Ask students to stand up if they fit any of the categories that you mention. Once students stand, thank them and then ask everyone to sit down to listen to the next statement. Found in: Wells, Leah, *Teaching Peace, A Guide for the Classroom and Everyday Life*, Santa Barbara: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2003.

### **Categories**

- You have felt that it was not always safe in the neighborhood around your school.
- You have made changes in your daily life – changing friends, avoiding certain parks and playgrounds and changing routes home to avoid violence.
- In the past three years, someone has threatened you, a family member or a friend.
- Someone has picked a fight with you, one of your family members or friends.
- Someone you know personally has had someone pull a knife on him/her.
- Someone you know personally has been in a situation where a gun was used threateningly.
- Someone you know has been a victim of family violence.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What does this tell you about our own lives?
2. How do you think teenagers in other parts of Colorado or the U.S. would respond to these categories?

Share with the students the following statistics from teenagers in a 1995 Harris Poll called “Between Hope and Fear: Teens Speak Out on Crime and the Community.”

- 40% felt that it was not always safe in the neighborhood around their schools.
- 46% have made changes in their daily lives – changing friends, avoiding certain parks and playgrounds and changing routes home.

### **Activity 2:**

### **Brainstorm on Violence vs. Nonviolence**

Put up two sheets of newsprint (or use the board) and put up the words violence and nonviolence asking students to list words that define these terms. See brainstorm list from students for ideas (Attachment B). Found in: Wells, Leah, *Teaching Peace, A Guide for the Classroom and Everyday Life*, Santa Barbara: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2003.

At the end of the brainstorm, educator might want to ask the students to take a look at the list they came up with. Are there any comments they want to make? Any observations from the lists they want to share?

### **Some comments the educator might want to make (depending on the list):**

- Some of what is up on the brainstorm lists has to do with personal attitudes, how we interact with others.
- Nonviolence involves working together (if words like sharing, team work, unity, compromise, etc. are up on the list).
- Many of the items on the violence list stem from a general state of insecurity. (In the next exercise, students will see that these personal attitudes that define violence and nonviolence have global implications.)

Now that we have a clearer understanding about what these concepts encompass, this next exercise will get us to think about violence on personal, community, and global levels.

### **Activity 3:**

### **Lesson on Interconnectedness**

This exercise involves a spiraling diagram. Start by labeling a point on the chalkboard with the word “me.” What kinds of conflict and/or violence can an individual personally experience? Common answers are conflict within oneself, with parents, friends, teachers, significant others, coaches, bosses, etc. Found in: Wells, Leah, *Teaching Peace, A Guide for the Classroom and Everyday Life*, Santa Barbara: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2003.

Write the responses on the board and, once that list is exhausted, draw a spiral around those words and label another point “my community.” Where does violence occur in the community? At school? In the neighborhood? With the police or other local authorities? Are there instances of environmental violence or conflict in the area? Are there particular issues that involve community conflict? Interesting responses have been road rage, pollution, domestic violence, gang activity, and police brutality, but by no means is this a comprehensive list.

Draw another spiral around those responses, and label another point “my country.” Where is there violence in the country? What kinds of situations, like child labor, poverty, freedom of speech and assembly, weapons making, and homelessness, can the students identify as being conflicts within their country?

Finally, draw the final spiral around these responses, and mark a point labeled “my world.” Have students list conflicts or instances of violence transpiring across the globe. Students often list conflicts in terms of wars, i.e. where violence is actively occurring. Encourage them to think about what wars mean for the people involved and if the types of conflicts already listed also exist at the global level. This part of the exercise should provide the final visual component for the students to recognize that the conflicts they experience on a personal level spiral outward to a global level.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What stands out to you when we look at the chart we've made?
2. Do the types of personal violence which we said exist on a personal level contribute or cause the violence in our communities, nation, and world, or vice versa? If so, how?

3. Are there similarities between violence on a global level and what we said happened in our country? community? personal lives? Describe them.
4. Remembering what our list of nonviolence looked like, would our spiral look different if these principles were prevalent in our personal lives? in our country? How?

#### **Activity 4:**

#### **Group Reading**

This class can be closed with students reading “If We Listen Well” by Edward Guinan. Give each student an article and go around in a circle so that each paragraph is read by a different student. Found in: *Solutions to Violence*, Colman McCarthy ed. Center for Teaching Peace. Found at: <http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html>

#### **Optional Activities:**

This class may be started with the Nonviolence Barometer exercise (see exercises in Unit One Lesson Two). It can then be done again at the end of the semester so that students can see how their opinions changed after the semester of readings, discussions, and activities.

#### **Helpful Hints / Comments from Previous Facilitators:**

As violence is so prevalent in our lives and what we learn, it was easier for students to define violence rather than nonviolence; their violence list was much longer. This may be the case with other groups as well, so some encouragement may be needed with the nonviolence list. If so, point this out to the class and reassure them that the nonviolence list can be just as long or longer and give them more time to come up with responses. Looking at the violence and identifying contrasting conditions may be helpful.

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## **Attachment A: I've Got Mail Icebreaker**

**Set Up:** Make sure there is one less chair than there are people in the group.

**Procedure:**

- 1) Have facilitator of group begin so students have an example of how activity is done.  
Facilitator stands in front of the group and says his or her name, where he or she is from and a personal fact about himself or herself.
- 2) Facilitator then says, "I've got mail."
- 3) Group responds, "for whom?"
- 4) Facilitator says, "For all people who have blue eyes"(or those who are wearing jeans, or name any characteristic that will apply to at least a few in the group).
- 5) Those in the group to whom this applies get up and have to change seats.
- 6) The person left standing now takes the place of the facilitator and starts out with procedure number 1.
- 7) This continues until all students have had the opportunity to get up and say something about themselves.

## **Attachment B: Brainstorm Responses on Violence/Nonviolence**

### **Violence**

Physical confrontation  
Negative emotional response  
Acting on anger  
Survival  
Ruthlessness  
Learned violence  
Neglect  
Product of environment  
Fear  
Pain  
Intolerance  
Chaos  
Vindictiveness  
Insecurity  
Paranoia  
Being threatening  
Prejudice  
Hatred  
Denial  
Greed  
Silence  
Control  
Intimidation  
Abuse  
Poverty  
Hunger  
Torture  
Conflict  
One force overpowering another

## **Nonviolence**

Love  
Patience  
Tolerance  
Understanding  
Perseverance  
Fearlessness  
Teaching  
Charity  
Letting go  
Companionship  
Transformation  
Peace  
Communication  
Courage  
Freedom  
Justice  
Teamwork  
Unity  
Sharing  
Compromise  
Humility  
Trust  
Assertiveness  
Generosity  
Joy  
Truth  
Kindness  
Respect  
Creativity



## **Attachment C: Responses to Lesson on Interconnectedness Activity**

### **ME**

- self-pity
- can't be yourself
- worthlessness
- self-blame
- gossip
- fighting with family
- self-hate
- fighting with friends
- suppressed anger
- disempowered
- being uninformed
- ignoring violence
- lack of responsibility
- feeling lonely
- feeling unaccepted
- arguments

### **COMMUNITY**

- uninformed
- domestic violence
- vandalism
- gang activity
- police brutality
- lack of natural resources
- apathy
- road rage
- overuse of resources
- environmental racism

### **NATION/WORLD**

- money
- politics
- power
- war
- Bush
- drugs
- hunger
- poverty
- homelessness
- helplessness
- media

## **Attachment D: Article**

### **If We Listen Well**

**By Edward Guinan**

For too long we have considered peace as the absence of conflict. We have approached the issue with this limited perspective and have directed our attention to the prevailing conflict of the moment, attempting to discover ways of reducing the destructiveness of the event. This approach is both necessary and desirable, but insufficient as we continue to approach the problem in a fragmented and isolated way. We continue to deal in symptomatic terms as if war and destruction and violence are the extensions and natural outgrowths of malignant attitudes, values, relationships, and beliefs that we continue to embrace.

#### **Peace**

Conflict will always be an integral part of human life but our methods of dealing with it need to change. We must be willing to develop an ongoing critical view of our values, operating premises and relationships, and a sensitivity to those about us.

Peace demands that one anticipate the effects of his views and actions on others and the unifying or destructive effects they may have. Most importantly one comes to realize that the "end" does not justify the "means": we get what we do, not what we hope for or intend. You cannot improve a man through punishment, nor can you bring peace through war or brotherhood through brutalization.

Finally one comes to appreciate the reality that there can be not "we's" and "they's" in our lives but only brothers and sisters - all children of God - all sacred and dignified. Destruction of any one of these God-gifts means a certain destruction of oneself, and a mystery that is gone forever from this small, fragile world.

#### **Violence**

Violence can be seen as destructive communication. Any adequate definition must include physical, verbal, symbolic, psychological and spiritual displays of hostility and hatred. The definition must include both our acts and our inactions and that which is done directly to people or indirectly to them through what they esteem. Many forms will take on a combination of these characteristics.

Violence should then include physical acts against another (i.e., the range of acts from personal attack to war which violate human autonomy and integrity); verbal attacks that demean and humiliate; symbolic acts that evoke fear and hostility; psychological attitudes that deny one's humanity and equality (legal, institutional, and moral); spiritual postures that communicate racism, inferiority, and worthlessness (i.e., beliefs and values that demean or categorize). Violence then becomes a dynamic rather than merely an act.

Hunger, poverty, squalor, privilege, powerlessness, riches, despair, and vicarious living are forms of violence - forms that a society approves and perpetuates. We have been too willing to discuss violence in terms of ghetto uprisings, student unrest, street thievery, and trashing, and have been unwilling to direct our attention to the more pathological types of violence that are acceptable - the types that daily crush the humanity and life from untold millions of brothers and sisters.

In the sixties we spoke with alarm of the "increase of violence" in our society, which may have been a half-truth; violence became more democratic in the decade of the sixties. Instead of resting exclusively with those who construct and maintain ghettos, keep food from the mouths of children, and coerce the young through educational programming and into war, violence became the tool of a widely divergent group seeking equality, power and redress.

Under the umbrella of violence there reside two distinctively different phenomena. First, there is the violence of men and women who act out of frustration, hopelessness and anger in an attempted grasp at life - the act of the slave breaking the chains, which is understandable and inevitable as long as some humans are in bondage. The other type of violence is the violence of the respectable, the violence of the powerful that seeks personal gain and privilege by maintaining inhuman conditions. It is the violence of the board rooms, legislators and jurists - the white collar violence that puts surplus milk down sewers, robs workers of their wages, maintains prisons of infamy, lies to children, discards the weak and old, and insist that some should half-live while others rape and ravage the earth. This latter type of violence is what we must become aware of and actively dismantle if the future is to hold any possibilities for peace and a world where all men and women have a right to live and develop and participate by reason of their humanity, not by reason of their class, productive ability or shrewdness.

## **Nonviolence**

Nonviolence cannot then be understood as passivity or indifference to the dynamic of life (i.e., communication between men). It is not the posture of removing oneself from conflict that marks the truly nonviolent man, but, quite on the contrary, it is placing oneself at the heart of that dynamic. Nonviolence means taking the responsibility for aiding the direction of human communication and brotherhood. Nonviolence means an active opposition to those acts and attitudes that demean and brutalize another and it means an active support of those values and expressions that foster human solidarity. Nonviolence, in essence, means taking a stand in favor of life and refusing to delegate individual moral responsibility to another person or group; it means taking control of one's life and aiding others in doing likewise. Nonviolence is an attempt to find truth and love even in the midst of hatred, destruction and pride.

As the means cannot be separated from the desired ends, nonviolence cannot be separated from peace, for it is the value system and dynamic that makes peace possible.

## **The Times**

The past has not be given to us; it is not ours to breathe or exhale. We live with the smallest perimeter, which we call today, and into this brief moment, into this small space we beckon and command the future. These are not good times, but good times do not mold great people. The sins of our excesses and arrogance can destroy us, or these failings can humble us to sainthood. Such are the times. If the great virtues and teachings of the martyrs, resisters, and saints are relegated to a utopian or future-oriented condition, then indeed, they have little value for us at all. But the great heritage that this "community of liberation" has left us is not some unreal, impossible dream. It is this: Love can, and must, be lived today, despite the pain and difficulty of such life. Tomorrow will carry the tenderness and peace which we live now. Do not compromise today. It is all, dear brothers and sisters, that we have. This assembled community of peacemakers has paid dearly for their belief in such words and their lives form a chronicle of inspiration. They have been demeaned and laughed at; they have been dragged through jails and courtrooms and prisons; a few have paid the price of peace with their lives.

## The Themes and People

The first signs of a violent society appear in its basic inability to communicate. Words lose their meaning and become hollow. They are twisted and deformed as tools of manipulation and servitude. Noble words such as truth, goodness, and love may come to mean despotism, obedience and death. Peace becomes another name for multiheaded war missiles, and nonviolence is wrenched to mean silence, or lack of opposition, to thievery, privilege and the status quo.

## The Spiritual

A line from a contemporary song pleads "Help me make it through the night." We find our existence framed in terms of aloneness rather than solidarity, struggles rather than consummations; departures rather than arrivals, questions rather than answers, and most importantly, night rather than daylight.

We cry out for fear the night will absorb us, yet we are unsure of any presence; we sing so as not to be crushed, yet the tones reflect the endless chant of the nightingales; we dance so as not to fall prey to these awesome interludes of emptiness; and most of all we pray so as not to lie. And these are the words we may use: "Help us make it through the night." Yet in the aloneness and struggle, in the departures and questions, in the cries and songs, in the dances and prayers there are imprints of heroic men and women, there are weavings of beauty, there are caresses of God. Traced through the faces of the old are messages of dignity and tenderness. The wail of the newborn is proof of silent breaths conspiring together. Each "forgive me" and "I love you" is prefaced by the warm tides of grace. Saints are born in Harlem in precise rhythm. Young people hurdle concrete mazes to touch and remember. Children weep for lost birds. Monks and mystics pray the sun up in the morning and call the evening dew. There are still wonderment, wishes and dreams.

You must never forget that you are the brother or the sister of a carpenter and the child of a king. You must remember that all life is unfulfilled without you. You must learn that life is mysterious and sacred and that you must never, never destroy it. And if you listen well you will hear the chanting of others, and they are singing to you: "Help us make it through the night."

*Edward Guinan is a Paulist priest and founder of the Community for Creative Nonviolence in Washington, D.C.*

*This reading is from **The Class of Nonviolence**, prepared by Colman McCarthy of the Center for Teaching Peace, 4501 Van Ness Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20016 202/537-1372. Article found on: <http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html>*