

## Unit One: Understanding Violence and Nonviolence

### Lesson 2: Exploring Nonviolence in Our Daily Lives

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

**Objectives of Lesson:** To introduce and discuss alternatives to violence.

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

**Vocabulary:** Pacifism

**Suggested Time:** Between 50 and 60 minutes (note: possibly two classes)

**Materials Needed:** Copies of articles: (from *Solutions to Violence*)

**Attachments:** A. Articles: “What Would You Do If” by Joan Baez and “Nonviolent Response to Assault” by Gerard A. Vanderhaar. (*Solutions to Violence*, Colman McCarthy ed. Center for Teaching Peace.)

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction to Lesson:

Through readings and discussion, this lesson explores alternatives to physical violence. Also included is an activity that encourages us to evaluate different scenarios and, applying what we've learned from previous discussions, determine whether the scenarios are violent or nonviolent.

**Icebreaker / Quick Activity to Assess Prior Learning:** None

#### Activities

##### **Activity 1:** **Group Reading**

Have students read, “What Would You Do If” by Joan Baez. Found in: *Solutions to Violence*, Colman McCarthy ed. Center for Teaching Peace. Found at: <http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html>

As the reading is a conversation between two people, pick 2 students (or to give more students a chance to participate, pick 2 groups of 2 students) to do the reading together. Depending on time available, it may be a good idea to highlight the important parts of the conversation for students to read.

Explain to the students that they will be reading a conversation between a skeptic and a pacifist during the Vietnam War. The skeptic is giving a number of hypothetical scenarios to the pacifist

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and asking what their nonviolent response would be. The pacifist responds with a scenario that is very real in our world today.

**Ask students before starting the reading:**

"I'd be interested to know how those in the group would define a pacifist? A skeptic?" A "pacifist" is someone who rejects violence in any form, (whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual) as a means of resolving disputes. It does not mean passive-ism; pacifism is an active stance against injustice and for nonviolent alternatives. A "skeptic" in this case, would find it difficult to believe in the effectiveness of nonviolence as a means to change or as a response to all situations.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What stands out in this article for you?
2. What is the pacifist saying about response to violence? What is the skeptic saying?
3. Why do you think it is so difficult for the skeptic to believe in what the pacifist is saying?
4. What about our society? Do media and education make us skeptics about the possibilities of nonviolence? If so, in what ways do they condition us toward this attitude?
5. Any additional comments before moving into the exercise?

**Activity 2:**

**Nonviolence Barometer**

Have students stand in single file in the middle of the room. One side is designated for nonviolence, the other side for violence. The middle is neutral and the ends of the room are extreme violence and nonviolence. Found in: Wells, Leah, *Teaching Peace, A Guide for the Classroom and Everyday Life*, Santa Barbara: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2003.

The educator reads out the following scenarios and then asks students to move along the barometer to a place that best fits their feelings toward the statement. Tell students this is not about good or bad or right or wrong. Rather the point is to define where you stand in relation to whether you think something is violent or not. The educator then asks various students to justify why they are standing where they are. The educator may spend between 3-5 minutes on each question, and students are allowed to move if they change their minds. Students may volunteer their answer or the educator may call on them to answer.

1. A couple is in a heated argument. The husband, who has physically abused his wife on several other occasions, steps towards her as if to hit her, she pushes him back. Is her action violent or nonviolent?
2. A woman hears her neighbor screaming and suspects that she is being abused by her husband but chooses not to go investigate.
3. You hear someone in the schoolyard using racial slurs or gender-biased language.
4. You leave your friend's house late at night and are on your way home. A suspicious looking man is coming toward you from the other direction. As he approaches you, you mace him.
5. In an extremely poor developing country, the government decides to increase the bus fare by 50 cents. Those who are against this price hike organize a protest. During the protest, they burn tires in the middle of the street, blocking the road.
6. Eating meat.

7. The U.S. Congress passes a bill that sacrifices some of our rights to privacy in order to combat terrorism.
8. Two young boys are playing in the schoolyard. One boy takes out his toy gun and pretends to shoot the other boy.

### **Processing the game**

Ask some of the following questions to help students process the game:

1. How did you feel about having other people know literally where you stand on different issues?
2. How did it feel to see that everyone did not agree on the answers? How did you feel about others' reasons for taking particular positions?
3. What do you think this game represents in a larger society?
4. Should everyone agree on the answers to these questions?
5. What was difficult about this game?
6. What did you learn about yourself in this game?
7. What did you learn about your classmates in this game?
8. Are there any situations where the outcome is not clear-cut and well-defined?

### **Activity 3:**

### **Group Reading**

Have the students read, "Nonviolent Response to Assault" by Gerard A. Vanderhaar. Found in: *Solutions to Violence*, Colman McCarthy ed. Center for Teaching Peace. Found at: <http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html>

Divide the group into 5 small groups and give each group a section of the reading. Each group should assign a note taker and a presenter. Allow the group 5-10 minutes to read their section and decide which main points they want to present to the class. After each group has presented, allow them to go around and quickly summarize what key points were made.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What stands out in this article for you?
2. Is this realistic?
3. What are some of the tactics the pacifist talks about?
4. Could some of these tactics be used in community / global conflicts?
5. Do you know other situations in life where something similar has occurred?

During the discussion there may be a great deal of skepticism in the class. Let students know that, while WE may not respond nonviolently in these scenarios, these articles at least expose us to alternatives that we may not have thought about before. It allows us to see the perspectives of others who HAVE been able to transform situations nonviolently. It also allows us to think about responses that empower us and diffuse the situation (such as remaining calm, for example, so as not to trigger a violent response from our assailant).

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

If not all the students are participating it might be a good idea to encourage others to join in the discussions by saying: "I'd really be interested in hearing from those who haven't participated as much", or "I'd like to give a chance to others in the group who haven't participated."

While doing the barometer exercise, students often get rowdy after a few scenarios have been read. A way to get them focused might be to, in a quiet voice, let them know you have more scenarios to read when they are ready. Then wait.

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## Attachment A: Articles

### What Would You Do If?

**By Joan Baez**

**Fred:** OK. So you're a pacifist. What would you do if someone were, say, attacking your grandmother?

**Joan:** Attacking my poor old grandmother?

**Fred:** Yeah, you're in a room with your grandmother and there's a guy about to attack her and you're standing there. What would you do?

**Joan:** I'd yell, "Three cheers for Grandma!" and leave the room."

**Fred:** No, seriously. Say he had a gun and he was about to shoot her. Would you shoot him first?

**Joan:** Do I have a gun?

**Fred:** Yes

**Joan:** No. I'm a pacifist, I don't have a gun.

**Fred:** Well, I say you do.

**Joan:** All right. Am I a good shot?

**Fred:** Yes.

**Joan:** I'd shoot the gun out of his hand.

**Fred:** No, then you're not a good shot.

**Joan:** I'd be afraid to shoot. Might kill Grandma.

**Fred:** Come on, OK, look. We'll take another example. Say, you're driving a truck. You're on a narrow road with a sheer cliff on your side. There's a little girl sitting in the middle of the road. You're going too fast to stop. What would you do?

**Joan:** I don't know. What would you do?

**Fred:** I'm asking you. You're the pacifist.

**Joan:** Yes, I know. All right, am I in control of the truck?

**Fred:** Yes.

**Joan:** How about if I honk my horn so she can get out of the way?

**Fred:** She's too young to walk. And the horn doesn't work.

**Joan:** I swerve around to the left of her since she's not going anywhere.

**Fred:** No, there's been a landslide.

**Joan:** Oh. Well then, I would try to drive the truck over the cliff and save the little girl.

*Silence*

**Fred:** Well, say there's someone else in the truck with you. Then what?

**Joan:** What's my decision have to do with my being a pacifist?

**Fred:** There's two of you in the truck and only one little girl.

**Joan:** Someone once said if you have a choice between a real evil and a hypothetical evil, always take the real one.

**Fred:** Huh?

**Joan:** I said, why are you so anxious to kill off all the pacifists?

**Fred:** I'm not. I just want to know what you'd do if...

**Joan:** If I was in a truck with a friend driving very fast on a one-lane road approaching a dangerous impasse where a ten-month old girl is sitting in the middle of the road with a

landslide on one side of her and a sheer drop-off on the other.

**Fred:** That's right.

**Joan:** I would probably slam on the brakes, thus sending my friend through the windscreen, skid into the landslide, run over the little girl, sail off the cliff and plunge to my own death. No doubt Grandma's house would be at the bottom of the ravine and the truck would crash through her roof and blow up in her living room where she was finally being attacked for the first, and last, time.

**Fred:** You haven't answered my question. You're just trying to get out of it...

**Joan:** - I'm really trying to say a couple of things. One is that no one knows what they'll do in a moment of crisis and hypothetical questions get hypothetical answers. I'm also hinting that you've made it impossible for me to come out of the situation without having killed one or more people. Then you say, 'Pacifism is a nice idea, but it won't work'. But that's not what bothers me.

**Fred:** What bothers you?

**Joan:** Well, you might not like it because it's not hypothetical.

It's real. And it makes the assault on Grandma look like a garden party. **Fred:** What's that?

**Joan:** I'm thinking about how we put people through a training process so they'll find out the really good, efficient ways of killing. Nothing incidental like trucks and landslides. Just the opposite, really. You know, how to growl and yell, kill and crawl and jump out of airplanes. Real organized stuff. Hell, you have to be able to run a bayonet through Grandma's middle.

**Fred:** That's something entirely different.

**Joan:** Sure. And don't you see it's much harder to look at, because it's real, and it's going on right now? Look. A general sticks a pin into a map. A week later a bunch of young boys are sweating it out in a jungle somewhere, shooting each other's arms and legs off, crying, praying and losing control of their bowels. Doesn't it seem stupid to you?

**Fred:** Well, you're talking about war.

**Joan:** Yes, I know. Doesn't it seem stupid to you?

**Fred:** What do you do instead, then? Turn the other cheek, I suppose.

**Joan:** No. Love thine enemy but confront his evil. Love thine enemy. Thou shalt not kill.

**Fred:** Yeah, and look what happened to him.

**Joan:** He grew up.

**Fred:** They hung him on a damn cross is what happened to him. I don't want to get hung on a damn cross.

**Joan:** You won't.

**Fred:** Huh?

**Joan:** I said you don't get to choose how you're going to die. Or when. You can only decide how you are going to live. Now.

**Fred:** Well, I'm not going to go letting everybody step all over me, that's for sure.

**Joan:** Jesus said, "Resist not evil." The pacifist says just the opposite. He says to resist evil with all your heart and with all your mind and body until it has been overcome.

**Fred:** I don't get it.

**Joan:** Organized nonviolent resistance. Gandhi. He organized the Indians for nonviolent resistance and waged nonviolent war against the British until he'd freed India from the British Empire. Not bad for a first try, don't you think?

**Fred:** yeah, fine, but he was dealing with the British, a civilized people. We're not.

**Joan:** Not a civilized people?

**Fred:** Not dealing with a civilized people. You just try some of that stuff on the Russians.

**Joan:** You mean the Chinese, don't you?

**Fred:** Yeah, the Chinese, try it on the Chinese.

**Joan:** Oh, dear. War was going on long before anybody dreamed up communism. It's just the latest justification for self-righteousness. The problem isn't communism. The problem is consensus. There's a consensus out there that it's OK to kill when your government decides who to kill. If you kill inside the country, you get in trouble. If you kill outside the country, right time, right season, latest enemy, you get a medal. There are about 130 nation-states, and each of them thinks it's a swell idea to bump off all the rest because he is more important. The pacifist thinks there is only one tribe. Three billion members. They come first. We think killing any member of the family is a dumb idea. We think there are more decent and intelligent ways of settling differences. And man had better start investigating these other possibilities because if he doesn't, then by mistake or by design, he will probably kill off the whole damn race.

**Fred:** It's human nature to kill. Something you can't change.

**Joan:** Is it? If it's natural to kill, why do men have to go into training to learn how? There's violence in human nature, but there's also decency, love, kindness. Man organizes, buys, sells, pushes violence. The nonviolent wants to organize the opposite side. That's all nonviolence is - organized love.

**Fred:** You're crazy.

**Joan:** No doubt. Would you care to tell me the rest of the world is sane? Tell me that violence has been a great success for the past five thousand years, that the world is in fine shape, that wars have brought peace, understanding, democracy, and freedom to humankind and that killing each other has created an atmosphere of trust and hope. That it's grand for one billion people to live off of the other two billion, or that even if it hadn't been smooth going all along, we are now at last beginning to see our way though to a better world for all, as soon as we get a few minor wars out of the way.

**Fred:** I'm doing OK.

**Joan:** Consider it a lucky accident.

**Fred:** I believe I should defend America and all that she stands for. Don't you believe in self-defense?

**Joan:** No, that's how the mafia got started. A little band of people who got together to protect peasants. I'll take Gandhi's nonviolent resistance.

**Fred::** I still don't get the point of nonviolence.

**Joan::** The point of nonviolence is to build a floor, a strong new floor, beneath which we can no longer sink. A platform which stands a few feet above napalm, torture, exploitation, poison gas, nuclear bombs, the works. Give man a decent place to stand. He's been wallowing around in human blood and vomit and burnt flesh, screaming how it's going to bring peace to the world. He sticks his head out of the hole for a minute and sees a bunch of people gathering together and trying to build a structure above ground in the fresh air. 'Nice idea, but not very practical', he shouts and slides back into the hole. It was the same kind of thing when man found out the world was round. He fought for years to have it remain flat, with every proof on hand that it was not flat at all. It had no edge to drop off or sea monsters to swallow up his little ship in their gaping jaws.

**Fred:** How are you going to build this practical structure?

**Joan:** From the ground up. By studying, experimenting with every possible alternative to

violence on every level. By learning how to say no to the nation-state, 'NO' to war taxes, 'NO' to military conscription, 'NO' to killing in general, 'YES' to co-operation, by starting new institutions which are based on the assumption that murder in any form is ruled out, by making and keeping in touch with nonviolent contacts all over the world, by engaging ourselves at every possible chance in dialogue with people, groups, to try to change the consensus that it's OK to kill.

**Fred:** : It sounds real nice, but I just don't think it can work.

**Joan:** : You are probably right. We probably don't have enough time. So far, we've been a glorious flop. The only thing that's been a worse flop than the organization of nonviolence has been the organization of violence.

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*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. found at: [www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html](http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html)*



## **Nonviolent Response to Assault**

**By Gerard A. Vanderhaar**

I've never been mugged - at least not yet. I have often thought, though, about what I would do if someone jumped out of the shadows with a knife and demanded my wallet. Or if that pair of teenagers on the isolated new York subway platform swaggered over and asked for twenty dollars. Or when I was stalled on an empty freeway a car suddenly pulled in front of me and the driver stepped out pointing a gun.

I don't know what I would do, and I'll never know until something like that happens. But right now, when I can think about it coherently, I know what I would like to do: remain calm. I would like to save my life, of course, and avoid whatever would trigger violence in my assailants. I would want to do whatever would diffuse the confrontation and turn it around.

Like automobile accidents, fires, tornados, and earthquakes, the possibility of personal assault is a fact of life today. We are all potential victims of a sudden attack on our persons, our possessions, our life. Everyone should be prepared to face it.

Conventional wisdom says that if we can't get away, we should either submit or fight back strongly. "Save your skin." Self-preservation is nature's first law, we're told. Get by wit the least damage to ourselves. An empty wallet is better than a slit throat. Losing one's virtue is better than losing one's life.

Or we are advised to use force if possible. A Memphis police lieutenant who runs clinics on how to cope with rape gives this advice: "First, try to escape or scare away the assailant by wrenching free or yelling. If the criminal doesn't let go, then you either have to give in, or hurt him in the most effective and efficient manner possible." This means gouge out an eye. Kick hard at the groin. Shoot, if you have a gun, and shoot to kill. His advice has a point for people not sensitive to nonviolence or not practiced in its ways. Essentially he offers the two traditional modes of survival in time of danger: flight or fight.

If we really believe, however, that active nonviolence is an effective alternative to flight or fight in other areas of life, we need to explore how we can respond nonviolently when an assault occurs. Here are some true stories about people who were not experienced in nonviolence, not committed to ahimsa, but who did just the right nonviolent thing at the right time.

### **Three events**

A woman with two children in a disabled car late one night on the New Jersey Turnpike looked up to see a man pointing a gun through her window. He ordered her to let him into the car. Instead of panicking, she looked him in the eye and, like an angry mother, commanded, "You put that gun away and get in your car and push me to the service area. And I mean right now!" He looked startled, put the gun away, went back to his car, and did as ordered, pushed her car to the service area.

A colleague of mine walking late one winter afternoon was jumped by two young men hiding in the bushes under a viaduct. They demanded money. He said he didn't have any. They began punching him, repeating their demand for money. He felt helpless and didn't know what to do. Then it flashed into his mind to call for the only assistance he could think of. He rolled his eyes and started shouting, "Jesus help me. Jesus help me!" And they stopped hitting him and looked at him as if he were crazy. And they ran away.

A lady drove into the parking garage of Memphis' largest hospital one afternoon to visit a friend. As she eased her car into a space she noticed a strange-looking man lurking nearby. No one else was in sight. She usually kept a gun in her glove compartment, she said later, but that afternoon she had left home without it. She had to think fast. She got out of the car, and as the man came over, she looked squarely at him and said in as firm a voice as she could muster, "I'm so glad there's a man around. Could you walk me to the elevator?" He replied meekly, "Yes, ma'am." She thanked him, got on the elevator alone - and practically collapsed out of fear and relief.

Although none of the three people were committed to nonviolence, they had improvised what we recognize as a true nonviolent response. They did not act like victims. They engaged the potential assailants as human beings, and in two of the incidents managed to evoke a sense of decency that resulted in their being helped rather than hurt.

Since we are faced with the possibility of being subject to assault - I prefer to say "subject to" assault rather than "victim of" - there is much we can do nonviolently to keep ourselves from becoming victims.

## **Prevention**

It is very nonviolent, not to mention practical, to do everything we reasonably can to avoid being attacked in the first place. This includes locking doors, walking with others rather than alone, avoiding high risk areas, and being alert to potential danger wherever we are.

For a person tuned to nonviolence, prevention is not being cowardly, but realistic/ We are not helping ourselves or any potential assailants in the vicinity by naively thinking that everything will be all right all the time. Out of ahimsa, the desire for non-harm, we need to avoid making ourselves easy objects for attack. We should not tempt others to attack us.

If we see an attack coming, we should avoid it or seek cover. A woman in Hungerford, England, who was at the scene when a gunman began firing his rifle at marketplace strollers, killing sixteen people said she survived because she "dove for cover."

Our safety precautions send a strong signal to anyone who would do us harm. It is not that we are scared, but that we are alert and prepared to take care of ourselves. Two strange men entered an aerobics class in which my wife was participating and began talking loudly, distracting the exercisers. No one knew what they wanted, but they seemed capable of creating mischief. One of the exercisers went over to speak to them. He told them quietly how serious the class was, and that anyone who wanted to take part had to sign a waiver form and pay a fee. They were welcome to join if they wanted. He didn't accuse or threaten; he just spoke straightforwardly, matter-of-factly. They listened, saw his seriousness, then turned away and left the room. No trouble. That was an exercise in prevention.

## **Restraint**

If we are against an attacker who is crazed by drug or drink, or who is schizophrenic, or temporarily insane, nonviolent human interaction is nearly impossible. If we have the opportunity, restraint may be our only recourse.

One man told me about his wife who had been mentally ill. "I looked into her eyes, and she seemed like she wasn't there," he said. She would scream and curse and throw things and was incapable of listening to anyone. She refused to see a doctor or do anything to help herself. Then one night, in one of her fits, she took a knife from the kitchen and started towards their child's bedroom. "That was the end of the line," he said. "I had to stop her." He bounded across the room and, as gently as possible but as firmly as necessary, her wrapped one arm around her from behind, grabbed the wrist of the hand that held the knife and squeezed until she dropped it. Then, still holding her, he dialed the emergency telephone number and waited for the ambulance to take her to the hospital. He said it was the hardest thing he ever had to do in his life.

When I think of restraining somebody, nonviolently, I would like to do it as strongly and effectively - and as lovingly - as that man did his wife.

## **Self-Possession**

As a remote preparation, long before any attack occurs, we can sharpen our ability for an effective nonviolent response by increasing the power of our personhood. We believe that we are important, we are valuable, and we want others to believe it about themselves. We are not victims; we are not cowering and cringing before life's challenges, fearfully looking over our shoulder to see what might be pursuing us. We stand straight, eyes calm, alert, moving ahead. We walk confidently, not with cockiness, which is a way of compensating for insecurity, but in a straightforward and open manner. We are not rash or brash; we don't take unnecessary risks, blind to danger. We are who we are, and we present ourselves to the world that way.

The caricature of the swaggering sheriff with a pistol strapped on one side, a heavy flashlight on the other, a Billy club dangling from his belt, so loaded down that he walks with his elbows pointed outward, is the image of a fearful man, so lacking in self-confidence that he needs all this hardware to protect himself.

If we are so dominated by fear that we arm ourselves to hurt those who would attack us, we have sunk to the level of the assaulter. We have become like the enemy in our desperation to overcome the enemy.

In principle, people committed to nonviolence don't carry weapons. It is because we believe in ahimsa, but it is also because we believe that in a crisis our personal ability is more effective than a gun. Truth, righteousness, and readiness are powerful nonviolent weapons. Armed with these, our personal power increases.

These weapons, more than guns and knives, have a deterrent effect on a would-be attacker. Think of a robber lurking in a doorway late at night watching potential marks approaching down the street. The robber will want to pick out those who look like easy victims: timid, uncertain, fearful, unprotected. Someone who appears in command,

confident, will not be as appealing a target. If I am this person, I'm likely to be passed over in favor of an easier target (and I'll probably never know how close I came to being attacked.)

A large-statured friend of mine, a long-time peace activist, wasn't passed over once. In a small town in South Dakota, on a sidewalk in full daylight he was suddenly faced with a much smaller man flashing a knife and demanding money. My friend, who has very little money anyway, said that the first thing he thought of was the incongruity of their sizes. "All I could do was laugh," he said. He didn't feel any fear, although later he said he was surprised he hadn't. His self-confidence was deep. The assailant glanced up at him, looked puzzled, then turned and ran away.

If an attack does occur, this kind of self-possession, this awareness of our personal power, this confidence in our nonviolent armor is the foundation of defense. But it's only the foundation. An understanding of what is likely to happen and some practice in nonviolent techniques can give us a truly effective defense against personal assault.

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*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. found at: [www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html](http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/index.html)*