

## Lesson 8: Heroism

### PURPOSE

To motivate students to embody heroism in their daily lives.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand that heroism means thinking and choosing to embody habits of excellence.
2. Recognize Mahatma Gandhi as a person who embodied heroism of self-determination.
3. Recognize heroic people from their surroundings, culture, history etc.

### VOCABULARY

- Heroism: embodying habits of excellence

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- [Video](#) Gandhi - Human Rights Activist | Mini Bio | Biography
- Mohandas Gandhi: Satyagraha: Not Passive Resistance
- Portrait of Heroism worksheet

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall the definition of habits of excellence and their most important characteristics. Recall the definition and the importance of self-determination.

Ask the students if they have persisted in the “seven days challenge”. Ask volunteers to present their results from the challenge, whether they managed to practice what they decided to, the biggest challenges they faced and how they counteracted them, the role of their support person in the process, and other similar details. For those who persisted in the challenge, ask if they have experienced some benefits.

Explain that it is not a problem if they struggled and failed, especially if they set a bigger challenge for themselves. The greater challenge also brings a greater likelihood of failure. Smaller challenges are easier to achieve, but they bring smaller benefits. The only real problem is if they did not struggle or try due to the challenge involved.

**Step 2:** Explain that today's topic is heroism and that during the class, students will explore what heroism is and how they can embody it. In the lesson, the class will try to recognize some people from their surroundings, history, and culture who embody heroic traits. Ask the students to share what they think are characteristics of a heroic person. Write the characteristics the students come up with on the board.

After hearing the students' comments, highlight some important traits of heroism:

- » Heroes are not born, heroism is developed through the everyday practice of excellent choices.
- » Heroism is about embodying different habits of excellence (they are all connected).
- » To develop heroism, one needs to have a strong sense of meaning and purpose, or a deep conviction that one needs to do what is right.
- » Heroism is oriented towards helping others, not primarily improving oneself (even though improving oneself also happens in the end).
- » Heroism is not about never making mistakes, but rather, always trying to get on the right track after making them.
- » Heroism is enhanced by excellent friendships. We need others to hold us accountable.

Conclude the discussion by writing a definition of heroism on the board:

Heroism: embodying habits of excellence

**Step 3:** Explain that, in this class, students will learn about the example of a person who embodied heroism of self-determination. His name is Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 – 1948) was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonialist, and political ethicist, who led a nonviolent civil resistance movement to lead the campaign for India's independence from British Rule. Independence was finally achieved in 1947. His movement inspired subsequent movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. The title Mahātmā, which in Sanskrit means "great-souled" or "venerable" was first applied to him in 1914 in South Africa and is now used throughout the world.

Play the [video](#) Gandhi - Human Rights Activist | Mini Bio | Biography to introduce students to basic information about Gandhi.

The movement that Gandhi inspired was based on the practice of solidarity with all people, including their oppressors. The main principle of the movement was captured under the term *satyagraha*. Satyagraha can be used both by individuals and by communities.

Divide the students into groups and ask them to read the “[Satyagraha: Not Passive Resistance](#)” text by [Gandhi](#) to learn more about the animating principle of his movement. The term satyagraha is usually translated as passive resistance. However, in the text, Gandhi explains that satyagraha is not the same as passive resistance. In fact, Satyagraha demanded a high degree of self determination from the person practicing it. The class will try to recognize what satyagraha really is and what made it so effective in achieving lasting social change.

The groups should discuss the questions associated with the text. After group discussions, ask each group to share their conclusions with the rest of the class. Lead a discussion based on the Answer Key associated with the text to show how Gandhi motivated others to join his civil resistance movement, animated by the principle of satyagraha.

**Step 4:** Ask the students to think individually about examples of heroism they know from their surroundings, culture, or history. Ask them to think about the habits of excellence these heroes embody and to fill out the [Portrait of Heroism](#) worksheet.

**Step 5:** Summarize. Highlight some of the things that constitute heroism, recall the definition of heroism and Mahatma Gandhi as an example of someone who embodied heroism of self-determination. Conclude by highlighting some important traits of heroism:

- » Heroes are not born, heroism is developed through the everyday practice of excellent choices.
- » Heroism is not about never making mistakes, but rather, always trying to get on the right track after making them.
- » Heroism is enhanced by excellent friendships. We need others to hold us accountable.

## Mahatma Gandhi: Satyagraha – Not Passive Resistance<sup>13</sup>

The force denoted by the term ‘passive resistance’ is not very accurately described either by the original English phrase or by its Hindi rendering. Its correct description is satyagraha. ‘Passive resistance’ conveyed the idea of the Suffragette Movement in England. Burning of houses by these women was called ‘passive resistance’ and so also their fasting in prison. All such acts might very well be ‘passive resistance’ but they were not satyagraha. It is said of ‘passive resistance’ that it is the weapon of the weak, but the power which is the subject of the article can be used only by the strong. This power is not ‘passive’ resistance; indeed it calls for intense activity. The movement in South Africa was not passive but active. The Indians of South Africa believed that Truth was their object, that Truth ever triumphs, and with this definiteness of purpose they persistently held on to Truth. They put up with all the suffering that this persistence implied. With the conviction that Truth is not to be renounced even unto death, they shed the fear of death. In the cause of Truth, the prison was a palace to them and its doors the gateway to freedom.

Satyagraha is not a physical force. A satyagrahi does not inflict pain on the adversary; he does not seek his destruction. A satyagrahi never resorts to firearms. In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill will whatever. Satyagraha is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called satyagraha. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love. ‘Non-violence is the supreme dharma’ is the proof of this power of love. Non-violence is a dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. In English there is a saying, “Might Is Right.” Then there is the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Both these ideas are contradictory to the above principle. Neither is wholly true. If ill-will were the chief motive-force, the world would have been destroyed long ago; and neither would I have had the opportunity to write this article nor would the hopes of the readers be fulfilled. We are alive solely because of love. [...]

[Satyagraha] brings good both to the satyagrahi and his adversary. It is ever victorious. For instance, Harishchandra was a satyagrahi, Prahlad was a satyagrahi, Mirabai was a satyagrahi. Daniel, Socrates and those Arabs who hurled themselves on the fire of the French artillery were all satyagrahis. We see from these examples that a satyagrahi does not fear for his body, he does not give up what he thinks is Truth; the word ‘defeat’ is not to be found in his dictionary, he does not wish for the destruction of his antagonist he does not vent anger on him; but has only compassion for him.

13 Rudrangshu Mukherjee. The Penguin Gandhi Reader. Satyagraha – Not Passive Resistance. September 1917 by Mahatma Gandhi.

A satyagrahi does not wait for others, but throws himself into the fray, relying entirely on his own resources. He trusts that when the time comes, others will do likewise. His practice is his precept. Like air, satyagraha is all-pervading. It is infectious, which means that all people – big and small, men and women – can become satyagrahis. No one is kept out from the army of satyagrahis. A satyagrahi cannot perpetrate tyranny on anyone; he is not subdued through application of physical force; he does not strike at anyone. Just as anyone can resort to satyagraha, it can be resorted to in almost any situation.

People demand historical evidence in support of satyagraha. History is for the most part a record of armed activities. Natural activities find very little mention in it. Only uncommon activities strike us with wonder. Satyagraha has been used always and in all situations. The father and the son, the man and the wife are perpetually resorting to satyagraha, one towards the other. When a father gets angry and punishes the son, the son does not hit back with a weapon, he conquers his father's anger by submitting to him. The son refuses to be subdued by the unjust rule of his father but he puts up with the punishment that he may incur through disobeying the unjust father. We can similarly free ourselves of the unjust rule of the Government by defying the unjust rule and accepting the punishments that go with it.

The question is asked why we should call any rule unjust. In saying so, we ourselves assume the function of a judge. It is true. But in this world, we always have to act as judges for ourselves. That is why the satyagrahi does not strike his adversary with arms. If he has Truth on his side, he will win, and if his thought is faulty, he will suffer the consequences of his fault.

What is the good, they ask, of only one person opposing injustice; for he will be punished and destroyed, he will languish in prison or meet an untimely end through hanging. The objection is not valid. History shows that all reforms have begun with one person. Fruit is hard to come by without tapasya [suffering]. The suffering that has to be undergone in satyagraha is tapasya in its purest form. Only when the tapasya is capable of bearing fruit do we have the fruit. [...]

Then it is said that much suffering is involved in being a satyagrahi and that the entire people will not be willing to put up with this suffering. The objection is not valid. People in general always follow in the footsteps of the noble. There is no doubt that it is difficult to produce a satyagrahi leader. Our experience is that a satyagrahi needs many more virtues like self-control, fearlessness, etc., than are requisite for one who believes in armed action. The greatness of the man bearing arms does not lie in the superiority of the arms, nor does it lie in his physical prowess. It lies in his determination and fearlessness in face of death.

[...] the strength of a warrior is not measured by reference to his weapons but by his firmness of mind. A satyagrahi needs millions of times more of such firmness than does a bearer of arms. Not only India but the whole world awaits the advent of such a man. We may in the meanwhile prepare the ground as much as we can through satyagraha.

**QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:**

Why is the term passive resistance not an adequate translation of satyagraha? What is satyagraha?

What historical evidence in support of satyagraha does Gandhi provide?

How can satyagraha produce a social movement?

**Answer Key for the teacher****1. Why is the term passive resistance not an adequate translation of satyagraha? What is satyagraha?**

“The force denoted by the term ‘passive resistance’ is not very accurately described either by the original English phrase or by its Hindi rendering. Its correct description is satyagraha. ‘Passive resistance’ conveyed the idea of the Suffragette Movement in England. Satyagraha is not a physical force. A satyagrahi does not inflict pain on the adversary; he does not seek his destruction. A satyagrahi never resorts to firearms. In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill will whatever. Satyagraha is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called satyagraha. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love. ‘Non-violence is the supreme dharma’ is the proof of this power of love.

Burning of houses by Suffragette women was called ‘passive resistance’ and so also their fasting in prison. All such acts might very well be ‘passive resistance’ but they were not satyagraha. It is said of ‘passive resistance’ that it is the weapon of the weak, but the power which is the subject of the article can be used only by the strong. This power is not ‘passive’ resistance; indeed it calls for intense activity. The movement in South Africa was not passive but active. The Indians of South Africa believed that Truth was their object, that Truth ever triumphs, and with this definiteness of purpose they persistently held on to Truth. They put up with all the suffering that this persistence implied. With the conviction that Truth is not to be renounced even unto death, they shed the fear of death. In the cause of Truth, the prison was a palace to them and its doors the gateway to freedom.

Non-violence is a dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. In English there is a saying, “Might Is Right.” Then there is the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Both these ideas are contradictory to the above principle. Neither is wholly true. If ill-will were the chief motive-force, the world would have been destroyed long ago; and neither would I have had the opportunity to write this article nor would the hopes of the readers be fulfilled. We are alive solely because of love.

Satyagraha brings good both to the satyagrahi and his adversary.”

**2. What historical evidence in support of satyagraha does Gandhi provide?**

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**3. How can satyagraha produce a social movement?**

“A satyagrahi does not wait for others, but throws himself into the fray, relying entirely on his own resources. He trusts that when the time comes, others will do likewise. His practice is his precept. Like air, satyagraha is all-pervading. It is infectious, which means that all people—big and small, men and women can become satyagrahis. No one is kept out from the army of satyagrahis. A satyagrahi cannot perpetrate tyranny on anyone; he is not subdued through application of physical force; he does not strike at anyone. Just as anyone can resort to satyagraha, it can be resorted to in almost any situation.”

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**Portrait of Heroism**

One person who embodies heroism:

What makes this person heroic?

What inspired me to choose this person?

Which habits of excellence does this person embody?

In which actions or situations are these habits of excellence most visible?

Which challenges did this person face?

What can I do to become more heroic like this person?