



**World Youth Alliance
Human Dignity Curriculum**

Grade 9

Lesson 1: Hierarchy of Being and Human Dignity

PURPOSE

To understand the special place human persons have in the world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand the powers humans share with animals and other living beings, and recognize the powers to think and choose as specifically human powers.
2. Understand human dignity as the universal, intrinsic and inalienable value of human persons.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Introductory Questionnaire
- Hierarchy of Being table
- [Video](#): What distinguishes humans from other animals? | Ken Miller

VOCABULARY

- Human dignity: the universal, intrinsic, and inalienable value of human persons
- Universal: every person has dignity
- Intrinsic: it is within each person, simply because they are human
- Inalienable: dignity cannot be given or taken away from a person
- Power: the ability of a living being to do something on its own
- Power to Think: the human ability to know and connect ideas about oneself, others, and the world
- Power to Choose: the human ability to knowingly select between options

PRELIMINARY ACTIVITY

Ask the students to fill out the [Introductory Questionnaire](#) before the first class. If you consider it helpful, discuss some of the questions to learn more about the students' opinions on some of the most critical issues the course deals with.

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Introduce the purpose of the course.

Ask students what they expect to learn in the course.

Explain that the course will primarily deal with the following questions:

Who am I?
What am I capable of?
What can I become?

In academic courses, the students are mostly learning about the world around them. In this course, they have the opportunity to learn about themselves. Knowing oneself is the first step in determining how to live a good life, how to have authentic friendships, how to deal with problems, and how to give and receive respect.

Knowing oneself is the basis of understanding what one is capable of and what one can become. If someone can achieve excellence in what they do, they can become excellent as a person. One purpose of this class is to learn how to become excellent people. During the course of the following lessons, the students will learn what this means.

Step 2: Explain that the core concept the students will explore in this curriculum is called human dignity. Only humans have a special value called human dignity. This dignity makes them worthy of respect and gives them certain rights, but also responsibilities; and demands that all people behave in a certain way to nurture and protect this dignity.

Engage students by asking questions:

Do all people have dignity? [Yes, without exception.]
Who gives it to them? [No one, each person has it simply by being human.]
Can it be taken away from someone? [No, it is always with each person, it is intrinsic.]
Do some people have it less or more? [No, it is the same in everyone.]
Do people in comas, persons with disabilities, etc. have it? [Yes, everyone has it.]

After initial discussion, explain that the word “human” in “human dignity” means that all humans have it and that they have it simply by being human. Even though people differ in many ways, they all possess human dignity regardless of any differences. It is important to note that no one gives people human dignity – it is not granted by the society, political community, family, etc. Every person has it simply by being human and no one can take this value away from people. Human dignity does not exist in degrees – one cannot say that some people have more or less than others--each person is equal in dignity.

Then, define human dignity and its three characteristics. Write on the board:

Human dignity: the universal, intrinsic, and inalienable value of human persons

Universal: every person has dignity

Intrinsic: it is within each person, simply because they are human

Inalienable: dignity cannot be given or taken away from a person

Step 3: Divide students into groups and hand them the [Hierarchy of Being table](#). Have them come up with three powers all living beings share, three which only animals and humans share, and two which only humans possess.

Write the following definition on the board:

Power: the ability of a living being to do something on its own

If the students have difficulty understanding the exercise, help them by asking the question: “Are plants able to move on their own from one place to another?” Explain that since the answer is no, that means they do not have this power. Obviously, someone could move the plant from one place to another, but the plants cannot do that by themselves without outside help. Of course, sometimes plant seeds disseminate, but this is not the same as moving on one’s own. The seed is usually taken to another place by the wind or by an animal, and not by the plant itself. Then, after the seed is taken to another place, a new plant grows. Point out how, on the other hand, animals and humans can move on their own, which means they do have this power. From these examples, help them to understand that the power to move from one place to another is the power of animals and humans, and not of plants. Follow the same approach to explain the other powers.

Step 4: Ask all groups to share their answers. Write an empty table on the board and fill it in as the students provide correct answers. The correctly filled table should look like the following:

	Plants	Animals	Humans
POWERS			
Eat	x	x	x
Grow	x	x	x
Reproduce	x	x	x
Move from place to place on their own		x	x
Use the senses		x	x
Feel emotions		x	x
Think			x
Choose			x

Explain that all living beings have powers to eat, grow and reproduce. Non-living beings like rocks can be divided into pieces by an outside force (e.g. if someone smashes them) but this is quite different from reproduction in living beings. Reproduction means creating a new member of one's species. When the rock is smashed, nothing new is created, but only the existing piece is divided into smaller pieces. Power to eat means that living beings are able to take in nutrients from the environment in order to sustain themselves. With the sufficient intake of nutrients and by receiving the needed support from the environment (e.g. warmth, parental support, etc.), living beings can grow and develop. Notice that the support from the environment helps living beings to grow, but it does not generate this growth. The growth is generated "from within" and each living being grows and develops following specific instructions coded for by their genes. These genes provide instructions and direction for growth.

Animals and humans share the extra powers which plants do not have. First, this is the power to use the senses, such as smell, touch, sight, sound and taste. With the senses, animals and humans gather information from the environment. Senses are the powers which help humans and animals to gather different kinds of information from the outside world or within ourselves. This is done through sensory organs (e.g. nose, eyes, ears, etc.) which means senses are connected to our bodies. Plants too receive stimuli from the environment (e.g. the flower being directed towards sunlight) but it is hard to say that they sense it, i.e. that they perceive the stimulus when being exposed to it. The third is the already mentioned power to move from one place to another.

Power to feel emotions is connected to the power to use the senses, both internal and external ones. After gathering information through the senses, animals and humans can experience reactions to the things that affect them through emotions. For example, an animal can see a predator approaching which can trigger the emotion of fear. A human person can hear someone making fun of him or her, and feel the emotion of sadness. On the other hand, when plants receive stimuli from the environment, they do not experience it emotionally. If someone cuts a tree, the tree does not feel pain.

Finally, humans alone have the power to think and choose. Plants and animals do not share this power. Animals, and especially higher animals like chimpanzees, do have some form of cognition and decision-making. However, this is always strictly connected to the basic survival instincts. For example, an animal can learn how to escape different mazes or use tools in order to reach food. A dog can learn how to respond to basic commands such as “sit”, “stay”, “go”. However, these are not, strictly speaking, the powers to think and choose. Humans are not just able to use more complex tools to reach food, but they can also decide to temporarily give up on food to pursue higher goals. Humans alone can think about complex concepts, such as solving a math problem, making new inventions, inventing jokes, or creatively expressing themselves through art. Humans are also fundamentally free from their environment. Whenever an animal is exposed to the same stimulus from the environment for a prolonged period of time, it will develop the same response to this stimulus (e.g. when exposed to pain, it will run away or attack back). But humans can freely decide how to respond to stimuli. For example, when someone hits us, we can decide neither to flee nor to fight back, but to forgive the person and try to reconcile with them.

Highlight once more that the powers to think and to choose are specifically human powers and write the definitions of those powers on the board:

Power to Think: the human ability to know and connect ideas about oneself, others, and the world

Power to Choose: the human ability to knowingly select between options

Step 5: To reinforce the idea that humans are fundamentally different from other living beings, show the [video](#) What distinguishes humans from other animals? by Ken Miller and invite students to share their comments.

Then, ask the students for examples of the situations in which we use human powers most visibly. Students will likely come up with different examples, but make sure to highlight the following:

Science
Technology
Education
Arts and creativity
Morality
Important life decisions

Lead the class discussion to show how only humans can do these things, such as going to space, painting the Mona Lisa, choosing between right and wrong actions, etc.

Step 6: Summarize. Today's lesson focused on the three powers which all living beings share (eat, grow, reproduce), three which only humans and animals share (move, use senses, feel emotions) and two which distinguish humans from all other beings: powers to think and choose. The class mentioned some examples of where these powers are most explicitly used. The most important thing distinguishing humans from other creatures is their special value, human dignity. The lesson defined three characteristics of human dignity: that it is universal, intrinsic and inalienable.

HIERARCHY OF BEING TABLE

In the left column write:

- 3 powers all living beings share
- 3 which only animals and humans share
- 2 which only humans have

Power: ability of a living thing to do something on its own

	Plants	Animals	Humans
POWERS			
	X	X	X
	X	X	X
	X	X	X
		X	X
		X	X
		X	X
			X
			X

Note: be ready to explain what each power entails.

Lesson 2: Subject vs. Objects

PURPOSE

To enable students to accurately recognize when their human dignity and that of others is respected and when it is not respected, both on an individual and a social level.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand that persons should always be treated as subjects, and never merely as objects.
2. Understand that societies violate human dignity when they treat persons as mere objects and recognize the historic violations of human dignity and rights, such as slavery, racism, antisemitism, caste system, etc.
3. Learn about two examples of persons who stood up in defense of human dignity: Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Mahatma Gandhi: excerpt from the Speech at Tanjore
- Martin Luther King, Jr.: I Have a Dream
- Violations of human dignity in the school table

VOCABULARY

- Treating persons as subjects: valuing persons for their intrinsic worth
- Treating persons as objects: using persons for personal pleasure or benefit

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Show students the empty [Hierarchy of Being](#) table and ask them to recall the powers all living beings share, those only animals and humans share, and those which only humans have. Highlight the powers to think and choose and mention in which situations they are most explicitly used. Recall the definition and three characteristics of human dignity.

Step 2: Introduce the subject-object distinction. Explain that objects are used as means to achieve specific goals or ends. On the other hand, subjects cannot be used as mere means. Objects are used, while subjects are valued for their dignity.

All non-living beings can be classified as objects (things, technology, tools, etc.), and to a certain extent, plants and animals as well (even though not in the same way as things). Human persons are in the category of subjects rather than objects.

Introduce the idea that because persons have dignity, they should always be treated as subjects, and never merely as objects. Persons should never be treated merely as objects and valued simply for their usefulness or the enjoyment they may bring. Highlight that whenever a person is treated as an object, this violates their dignity.

Write on the board:

Treating persons as subjects: valuing persons for their intrinsic worth

Treating persons as objects: using persons for personal pleasure or benefit

To treat another person as an object is to use them for personal pleasure, advantage, or benefit. Rather than recognizing what would be good for that person, when people treat others as objects, they focus on what the person can do for them. When people use other people merely to get what they want rather than caring for their well-being, they are treating them like tools, such as cell phones and hammers. This way of treating human beings goes against their dignity.

To help students reflect on concrete examples of treating others as subjects and objects in their immediate surroundings, divide students into groups and ask them to fill [Violations of human dignity in the school table](#). Afterwards, ask the groups to share their conclusions with the rest of the class and lead the discussion with the whole class.

Step 3: Highlight that human dignity, as a special value of each human being, should be a foundation of a free and just society. A society, to be truly just, needs to respect human dignity. In terms of importance, human dignity comes before society. For this reason, no human community can grant or rescind that dignity. [Human dignity is not given to people by society, people have it because they are human persons](#). For this reason, no society can take away dignity or decide that some groups don't have human dignity.

Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that societies do not respect human dignity. Explain the subject-object distinction in the context of social systems:

Societies that treat persons as objects...	Societies that treat persons as subjects...
Treat them only for their use	Respect and value them for their dignity
Use persons as means for the goals of society	Use the society to serve the good of the persons
Manipulate	Ask for their opinion
Dispose of elderly, sick, vulnerable	Care for elderly, sick, vulnerable
View human life in economic terms	Understand that human life is priceless
Own, buy and sell them	Understand that persons cannot be owned
Get rid of when no longer useful, productive	Protect when they can't do it themselves
Treat some groups as having less dignity than others	Recognize that everyone has equal dignity
Separate persons from the communal ties needed for their flourishing (family, friends, Church, associations)	Support the communal ties needed for human flourishing (family, associations, Churches...)

Some social systems treat persons as objects and in this way, violate their dignity. Ask the students if they know of historical situations when a society disrespected human dignity by treating certain people as objects. Human dignity cannot be granted or rescinded by society. Nevertheless, has a society ever tried to rescind human dignity from a certain group of persons?

After students share their opinions, have them recognize some of the biggest historical injustices:

- Slavery
- Racism
- Anti-Semitism
- Eugenics
- Caste system, etc.

Through the discussion, have the students recognize why each of these systems was unjust, i.e. because it treated the persons as objects by:

Owning, buying and selling them and viewing human life in economic terms (slavery)
Treating some groups as having less dignity than others (Black people, Jews, lower castes in India)
Disposing of elderly, sick, vulnerable, viewing human life in economic terms (eugenics)

Lead the students to conclude once more that human dignity must be a foundation of every society which aims to be free and just.

Step 4: Ask the students if they know some of the great persons who stood up to the mentioned injustices of slavery, racism, caste system etc. Explain that today they will learn about two such persons:

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) was an Indian lawyer and political and spiritual leader who was leading an anti-colonialist movement fighting for India's independence from British rule. He led non-violent protests to advance his cause.
Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) was an American Christian minister and activist for the rights of African Americans. He was among the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968. He advanced civil rights through nonviolence and civil disobedience, inspired by his Christian beliefs and the nonviolent activism of Gandhi.

Divide the students into an even number of groups. Half of the groups will receive a [speech from Mahatma Gandhi](#) and the other half will receive one from [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) Students should read the speeches and discuss their questions in groups.

After all groups finish reading and discussing, they should present the conclusion to the rest of the class. The teacher should highlight the most important points from the texts.

Step 5: Summarize. Recall the subject-object distinction and highlight that persons should always be treated as subjects, never merely as objects. Recall how societies can treat persons as objects and how they can treat persons as subjects. Recall some historical violations of human dignity on the social level. Highlight most important ideas expressed by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Mahatma Gandhi: excerpt from the Speech at Tanjore¹

Delivered on 16 September 1927.

I had hoped on coming to Tanjore today to discuss the Brahmin–non–Brahmin² question here and I had the pleasure of having a brief discussion with some of the friends this afternoon. [...]

They seemed to think that I had identified myself with the notion of inherited superiority and inferiority. I assured them that nothing was farther from my thought and told them that I would gladly explain my meaning of *varnashrama*³ more fully than I have done in order to remove the slightest misunderstanding as to this question of superiority. In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of Advaita⁴ and my interpretation of Advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All – whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever – have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the Brahmins themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. *I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being.* And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the Bhagavad Gita⁵, and I am therefore through and through with every non–Brahmin when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a Brahmin or by anybody else. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

But in spite of all my beliefs that I have explained to you, I still believe in *varnashrama dharma*. [...] *Varnashrama dharma* is humility. Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish therefore to suggest that qualities are not inherited, but on the contrary I believe that just as everyone inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors. [...]

1 Mahatma Gandhi: The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 1958.

2 Brahmins were the highest of the four social classes in Hinduism, specialising as priests, teachers, and protectors of sacred learning

3 The organization of society into four castes, and the division of life into four stages

4 The view that the *atman*, the self in man, is not distinct from the Brahman, the Absolute; literally, 'non-dualism'

5 Holy book of Hinduism, part of Mahabharata

And if you accept what I have ventured to suggest to you, you will find that the solution of the Brahmin and non-Brahmin question also, insofar as it is concerned with the religious aspect, becomes very easy. As a non-Brahmin I would seek to purify Brahminism insofar as a non-Brahmin can, but not to destroy it... I would not touch his great learning wherever I see it. And whilst he may not claim superiority by reason of learning I myself must not withhold that need of homage that learning, wherever it resides, always commands. But I must not go deeper into the subject before a large audience of this kind.

After all I must fall upon one sovereign remedy which I think is applicable for all the ills of life. And that is, in whatever fight we engage, the fight should be clean and straight, there should not be the slightest departure from truth and ahimsa⁶. And if we will keep our carriage safely on these two rails you will find that our fight even though we may commit a thousand blunders will always smell clean and will be easier fought. And even as a train that is derailed comes to a disastrous end, so shall we, if we be derailed off these two rails, come to a disaster. A man who is truthful and does not mean ill even to his adversary will be slow to believe charges even against his foes. He will, however, try to understand the viewpoints of his opponents and will always keep an open mind and seek every opportunity of serving his opponents. I have endeavoured to apply this law in my relations with Englishmen and Europeans in general in South Africa as well as here and not without some success. How much more then should we apply this law in our homes, in our relations, in our domestic affairs, in connection with our own kith and kin?

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was an Indian lawyer and political and spiritual leader who was leading an anti-colonialist movement fighting for India's independence from British rule. He led non-violent protests to advance his cause.

QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

Does the doctrine of inherited superiority recognize persons as subjects or as objects? Why does Gandhi not accept it?

How would Gandhi resolve the Brahmin and non-Brahmin question?

What kind of approach does he advise when defending or promoting some cause?

6 Principle of avoiding violence towards all living beings.

Answer Key for the teacher

- 1. Does the doctrine of inherited superiority recognize persons as subjects or as objects? Why does Gandhi not accept it?** This doctrine treats some persons (non-Brahmins) as objects because it treats them as having less dignity than others (Brahmins) simply for the reasons of birth or acquired knowledge. Gandhi believes that there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. He believes that all men are born equal. All - whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever - have the same soul as any other. And because he believes in this inherent equality of all men, he fought the doctrine of superiority in South Africa and he has fought against the Brahmins themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. Gandhi believed that he who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man.
- 2. How would Gandhi resolve the Brahmin and non-Brahmin question?** Gandhi believes that we should reject the doctrine of superiority of some people over others, but at the same time pay respect to someone's learning when he or she deserves it: "As a non-Brahmin I would seek to purify Brahminism insofar as a non-Brahmin can, but not to destroy it... I would not touch his great learning wherever I see it. And whilst he may not claim superiority by reason of learning I myself must not withhold that need of homage that learning, wherever it resides, always commands."
- 3. What kind of approach does he advise when defending or promoting some cause?** Gandhi says: "After all I must fall upon one sovereign remedy which I think is applicable for all the ills of life. And that is, in whatever fight we engage, the fight should be clean and straight, there should not be the slightest departure from truth and ahimsa. And if we will keep our carriage safely on these two rails you will find that our fight even though we may commit a thousand blunders will always smell clean and will be easier fought. And even as a train that is derailed comes to a disastrous end, so shall we, if we be derailed off these two rails, come to a disaster. A man who is truthful and does not mean ill even to his adversary will be slow to believe charges even against his foes. He will, however, try to understand the viewpoints of his opponents and will always keep an open mind and seek every opportunity of serving his opponents."

Martin Luther King (Jr.): I Have a Dream⁷

Delivered on 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.

7 Martin Luther King (Jr.): "I Have a Dream" Speech, 1999.

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day... one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

How were black persons treated as objects in America? Why does Martin Luther King believe America has failed its promise?

How does he advise his people to conduct the struggle they are facing?

What is his dream about?

FOR REVIEW

Answer Key for the teacher

1. **How were black persons treated as objects in America? Why does Martin Luther King believe America has failed its promise?** Black persons were treated as objects in America by the denial of certain fundamental rights (such as the right to vote and of election to public office) and by being treated as unequal to white people. Martin Luther King says:

“When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the “unalienable Rights of `life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness`. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’”

2. **How does he advise his people to conduct the struggle they are facing?** King was a strong believer in non-violence and hatred toward none. He says:

“But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.”

3. **What is his dream about?** King describes his dream in the following words:

“It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day... one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

FOR REVIEW

Violations of human dignity in school

Think about one example in which persons are treated as objects or their dignity is disrespected. Explain why this situation is not respectful of their dignity. Propose a solution for how the class should deal with this situation.

Description of the situation	Why is it not respectful of human dignity?	Possible solutions

Violations of human dignity in school – Example

Think about one example in which persons are treated as objects or their dignity is disrespected. Explain why this situation is not respectful of their dignity. Propose a solution for how the class should deal with this situation.

Description of the situation	Why is it not respectful of human dignity?	Possible solutions
<p>A student who is not very outgoing and who studies hard is often called a “weirdo” and teased by other students. A group of “cool” guys from our class and some other classes are often making fun of him in front of others. Sometimes this also turns into bullying and some form of physical violence (e.g. slapping him, throwing his things around). Most of the other students are usually just standing by not doing anything. Some laugh, some definitely feel uncomfortable but nobody says anything.</p>	<p>Because the person who is studying hard is not treated as a subject with dignity but as an object: he is used as an object of making fun, his feelings are disrespected and he is not shown empathy by others, but the group of “cool” kids doesn’t care how he feels. They are also not talking to him, but at him, and are not trying to develop a relationship with him.</p>	<p>Those who stand by and watch a student being bullied should stand up and say that what’s happening is not right.</p> <p>They should also report to educators if the situation continues to happen.</p> <p>Those in the group of “cool” kids who feel that what they are doing is not right, should motivate the group to find another kind of amusement which will not be disrespectful of anyone’s human dignity (e.g. sports, dance, physical exercise etc.).</p>

Lesson 3: Power to Think about Speech

PURPOSE

To always strive to acquire truth in speech and to acquire excellent thinking habits.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand the importance of using our power to think in an excellent way.
2. Learn about and apply Socrates' triple filter rule.
3. Distinguish between habits of excellent and non-excellent thinking.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Socrates' Triple Filter Test
- Conversation: Do we need laws?
- Mahatma Gandhi: "Devotion to Truth"

VOCABULARY

- Power to Think: the human ability to understand and connect ideas about oneself, others, and the world

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall the subject-object distinction and highlight that persons should always be treated as subjects, never merely as objects. Reemphasize the ways in which some societies treat persons as objects and how some treat them as subjects. Discuss some historical violations of human dignity on a social level. Highlight the most critical arguments expressed by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr..

Step 2: Discuss how the power to think is a specifically human power which distinguishes humans from all other beings. Human beings use this power in different capacities: in education, work, personal decision making, action, etc.

Write the definition on the board:

Power to Think: the human ability to understand and connect ideas about oneself, others, and the world.

One of the most important uses of the power to think is speech, and it is critical that people use their power to think to inform their speech. This lesson will explore how to best use the power to think when communicating through speech.

Introduce [Socrates' Triple Filter Test](#) and ask a volunteer to read it out loud. Explain that Socrates was one of the first Greek philosophers and a teacher of Plato. Most of the information about Socrates that exists today is drawn from Plato's writings. One of Socrates' most famous statements was: "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think." Encouraging people to think deeply was one of the signature aspects of Socrates' work as a philosopher, and the Triple Filter Test is an example of that. Once, a student of Socrates wanted to tell him something negative that he had heard about Socrates from another person. Before listening to his student, Socrates wanted the message to go through a "Triple Filter Test". He argued that if the message did not pass the test, it wasn't worthy of being heard.

Ask the students to comment on how Socrates advises people to think about what they are saying and if they agree with it.

After listening to the initial comments, explain that Socrates' triple filter encourages people to use the power to think and to communicate through speech in a way that respects other people's dignity.

a) To have the **truth** in speech, people should check if:

The message is based on facts (or mere opinions, prejudice, appeal to emotions etc.)
The message is from a relevant authority.
The conclusion follows logically.

b) To check whether it is **good** people should:

See if it respects human dignity (or it wants to humiliate, offend...)
See if it promotes excellence or not (for example, if it does not help the person to become better)

c) To check whether it is **useful**, people should:

Determine whether it helps in any way (or if it will make things worse for the person)
Determine if it will bring any benefit to the other person or myself (or if it will do harm)

Step 3: To have truth in speech, people should responsibly use their power to think. The best way to use one's power to think is to acquire the habit of thinking in an excellent way. Just as one's power to choose can be used in an excellent or a non-excellent way, one can use their power to think in an excellent or non-excellent way.

Display the following notions on the board one by one and ask the students to identify which represent habits of thinking in an excellent way and which represent habits of thinking in a non-excellent way:

Listening to different points of view.
Using stereotypes.
Judging based on prejudice.
Making a judgment based on good reasons.
Gathering enough evidence.
Rushing to conclusion.
Considering if I might be wrong.
Being open-minded.
Discarding valid criticism because it makes one feel bad.
Disregarding some opinion because I don't like a person who is saying it.
Being curious.
Being interested in the truth more than in being right.
Taking things for granted.
Asking advice from wise people.
Thinking about the consequences of your ideas and actions.
Being consistent in your positions.
Letting anger blur your judgement.
Arguing that something is true simply because you say so.
Distorting someone's argument.
Accepting valid criticism.
Attacking the person's character to discredit their argument.
Being intentionally ambiguous.
Providing arguments for your positions.
Avoid answering a legitimate question.

When analyzing each example one by one, group them into two columns, like in the table below. Ask the students to explain why they think a habit is excellent or non-excellent.

Habits of excellent thinking	Habits of non-excellent thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Listening to different points of view. » Making a judgment based on good reasons. » Gathering enough evidence. » Considering if I might be wrong. » Being open-minded. » Being curious. » Being interested in the truth more than in being right. » Seeking advice from wise people. » Thinking about the consequences of your ideas and actions. » Being consistent in your positions. » Accepting valid criticism. » Providing arguments for your positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Using stereotypes. » Judging based on prejudice. » Rushing to conclusion. » Discarding valid criticism because it makes you feel bad. » Disregarding some opinion because I don't like a person who is saying it. » Taking things for granted. » Letting anger blur your judgment. » Arguing that something is true simply because you say so. » Distorting someone's argument. » Attacking the person's character to discredit their argument. » Being intentionally ambiguous. » Avoid answering a legitimate question.

Explain that some bad ideas have very serious consequences. One such example is slavery (the practice of attempting to own other people under forced servitude). Another example is racist ideology, such as National Socialism, racial segregation in the United States or the apartheid in South Africa (these abide by the idea that some races are inferior or superior to others). Historical examples of these injustices include the Rwandan genocide (based on the idea of ethnic cleansing) or different totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union (based on the idea that the individual can be used as means for the state).

Aristotle argues that a small error in the beginning leads to a large error in the end. The practical application of this idea to the habit of thinking in an excellent way is that each person should start practicing habits of excellent thinking in everyday life, in discussions with friends, and on social media. Practicing habits of excellent thinking in small things (even though no excellent thinking is small) naturally leads to great ideas and achievement in the future.

Step 4: Divide students into groups. Have the groups read [Conversation: Do we need laws?](#) and identify each habit as either excellent or non-excellent thinking. The students should point out the specific good or bad habit they recognize in each scenario. After each group has finished analyzing the conversation, ask them to share their analyses with the class. Lead a class discussion about the excellent and non-excellent habits of thinking present in these conversations.

Step 5: Summarize. Focus on [Socrates' triple filter test](#) and its main "ingredients". Remind the students of the importance of developing habits of excellent thinking and repeat once more some of excellent and non-excellent thinking habits.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY

Divide students into groups and ask them to read the speech [Devotion to Truth by Mohandas \(Mahatma\) Gandhi](#). Each group should highlight two or three important ideas from the speech and share their thoughts. Each group should then present their conclusions to the rest of the class.

During the class discussion, the teacher should provide the following quotes:

"All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life."

"Without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life...There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action."

Explain that the goal of thinking is to reach the truth, or that which corresponds to reality. Using the power to think in the best way possible allows people to distinguish between what is true and what is simply apparent, what are decisions and actions we should take, how we should organize society, etc. Using the power to think properly will result in learning new things, solving problems, and making good decisions for oneself and for the larger community (family, class, country, etc.). These habits of thinking in an excellent way will lead to breakthroughs in science and the development of new technologies that can be used to improve human life and development.

Gandhi argues that truth should be the center of our lives, and that it should be found in speech, thought and action. For this reason, this curriculum will focus on how to reach the truth through thought, speech, action, and emotions (which have a real influence on what we think, say, or do).

Socrates' Triple Filter Test⁸

This story tells that, one day, one of Socrates' disciples was quite agitated. He told Socrates that he had met one of Socrates' friends and that he had spoken badly of him.

Socrates asked the man to calm down. After thinking for a moment, he asked him to wait a minute. Before listening to what he had to say, the message had to go through a triple filter test. If the message didn't pass the test, it wasn't worthy of being heard.

As he always did, the Greek philosopher asked his anxious disciple a question: "Are you absolutely sure that what you're going to tell me is true?" The disciple thought for a moment. In fact, he couldn't be sure if what his friend had told him was actually malicious. It was a matter of perspective. "So you do not know if everything he said about me is true or not," said the philosopher. The disciple had to admit that he didn't.

Then, Socrates asked him a second question: "Is what you're going to tell me good or not?" The disciple replied that, evidently, it wasn't good at all. In fact, it was quite the opposite. He believed that what he was going to share with the philosopher would cause him discomfort and distress. Thus, Socrates said to him: "You're going to tell me something bad, but you're not completely sure it's true". The disciple admitted that this was the case.

Then, Socrates asked the third and final question: "Is what you have to say about my friend going to help me?" The disciple hesitated. He really didn't know if that information was useful or not. Maybe it would distance him from his friend, but considering that he wasn't sure whether it was true or not, maybe it wasn't useful at all.

In the end, the philosopher refused to listen to what his disciple wanted to tell him. "If what you want to tell me isn't true, isn't good, and isn't even useful, why would I want to hear it?" he finally told his disciple.

⁸ Socrates' Triple Filter Test, *Exploring your mind*, available at <https://exploringyourmind.com/socrates-triple-filter-test/> (last visited Nov 8, 2022).

Conversation: Do we need laws?

[Instructions: read the conversation and recognize the habits of excellent and non-excellent thinking. Highlight which excellent or non-excellent habit you recognize next to the sentence in which this habit was displayed. You can apply habits from the table below:

Habits of excellent thinking	Habits of non-excellent thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Listening to different points of view. » Making a judgment based on good reasons. » Gathering enough evidence. » Considering if I might be wrong. » Being open-minded. » Being curious. » Being interested in truth more than in being right. » Asking advice from wise people. » Thinking about the consequences of your ideas and actions. » Being consistent in your positions. » Accepting valid criticism. » Providing arguments for your positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Using stereotypes. » Judging based on prejudice. » Rushing to conclusion. » Discarding valid criticism because it makes you feel bad. » Disregarding some opinion because I don't like a person who is saying it. » Taking things for granted. » Letting anger blur your judgment. » Arguing that something is true simply because you say so. » Distorting someone's argument. » Attacking the person's character to discredit their argument. » Being intentionally ambiguous. » Avoid answering a legitimate question.

Note: some habits may occur more than once. Not all habits from the table are necessarily present in the conversation.]

CONVERSATION:

Mike, John and Lucy were on their way to school when Lucy started talking about the documentary she saw last night.

Lucy: Last night I saw what horrible things Nazi Germany did to people they didn't like. All people are equal in their worth, I don't see how they could think anything different.

John: I agree. Something like that should have never happened.

Lucy: Yes, it all happened because one man enforced a law and made other people act that way. People were punished if they refused to cooperate. Laws don't do us any good. I wish there weren't any laws.

Mike: I don't think this conclusion is right.

Lucy: What? So, you don't mind that laws tortured people?

Mike: That's not what I am saying. Let me explain. I just think the situation is more complex than that. Although those were really bad laws, laws, in general, are not useless. For example, given that we are vulnerable and the altruism of others is limited, we cannot survive without rules prohibiting the free use of violence; so such rules are necessary.

John: Why do you always have to stand out and be special? Can't you agree with everyone just once?

Lucy: I see what you mean by that, Mike, but how do you explain that precisely the laws didn't protect people, but they incited violence?

Mike: Yes, you are right. As I said, laws are not without flaws, but I don't think the idea that all laws should not exist is something we should agree with. The laws should be made in a way that persons are put before the laws. Laws exist for the persons and not the other way around. It's not that people exist to follow the laws.

John: Ok, so you are saying that each person should act according to his or her private standards. In that way, no one can impose their standards through laws.

Mike: I think there should be a consensus which standards we should implement as laws. That's why we have different declarations which say that the human dignity of every person is to be respected in every way. Therefore, laws should be made in a way that recognizes human dignity and protects each person's rights.

John: You are just trying to be smart in front of us. We are not in school yet. You can't get an A from us.

Lucy: Ok, I know what I said and what I saw yesterday, but how can we guarantee that leaders of countries will follow some objective standards and not their private ones?

John: I think that everyone should follow their own standards. There is no one truth that everyone should follow. Everyone who doesn't think this way obviously needs to educate himself more and stop being so rigid and try to impose their opinion. Great philosophers would all agree.

Mike: Aren't the subjective moral standards the most problematic thing here? Isn't relativizing objective standards such as human dignity, the reason why these laws passed in the first place?

John: I know what I believe and this is that laws only limit people, they prevent us from being truly free.

Mike: Lucy, to be honest, I don't have all the answers. I think we should ask our history or ethics professor to help us with this problem.

John: I don't see a need for that, I believe I am right and nothing can change it.

Lucy: I thought of another problem with your opinion on this, Mike. What should the people do once this or any other immoral or unjust standard is enforced as law? For example, laws allowing slavery or racial segregation.

Mike: I know this is a problem. I guess what we should do is practice habits of excellent thinking in order to determine which laws are just before bringing them. But, if our leaders enforce unjust laws which don't respect human dignity, then I believe we shouldn't follow them, but we should work to change them.

Lucy: OK, maybe this makes sense. Maybe a complete absence of laws could lead to chaotic behavior. So maybe my views are wrong, but still, I can't say I completely agree with you. I definitely need to do more research. I think there is a potential of misuse in all of this.

Mike: Definitely, but it can't be any better if there are no laws. I think that just laws can help us to know what is right and wrong. They also hold us responsible for our actions. And they protect the most vulnerable among us, those who cannot protect themselves. These are all good things we shouldn't easily discard.

Lucy: I guess you are right, I will think about it more thoroughly to consider everything that you were saying.

John: Ok, our class starts in one minute. We can finish the discussion later.

FOR REVIEW

Conversation – Answer Key for the teacher

Mike, John and Lucy were on their way to school when Lucy started talking about the documentary she saw last night.

Lucy: Last night I saw what horrible things Nazi Germany did to people they didn't like. All people are equal in their worth, I don't see how they could think anything different.

John: I agree. Something like that should have never happened.

Lucy: Yes, it all happened because one man enforced a law and made other people act that way. People were punished if they refused to cooperate. Laws don't do us any good. I wish there weren't any laws.

Mike: I don't think this conclusion is right.

Lucy: What? So, you don't mind that laws tortured people? [Rushing to conclusion.]

Mike: That's not what I am saying. Let me explain. I just think the situation is more complex than that. Although those were really bad laws, laws, in general, are not useless. For example, given that we are vulnerable and the altruism of others is limited, we cannot survive without rules prohibiting the free use of violence; so such rules are necessary. [Providing arguments for your positions. Making a judgment based on good reasons.]

John: Why do you always have to stand out and be special? Can't you agree with everyone just once? [Disregarding some opinion because I don't like a person who is saying it.]

Lucy: I see what you mean by that, Mike, but how do you explain that precisely the laws didn't protect people, but they incited violence? [Being open-minded. Being curious.]

Mike: Yes, you are right. As I said, laws are not without flaws, but I don't think the idea that all laws should not exist is something we should agree with. The laws should be made in a way that persons are put before the laws. Laws exist for the persons and not the other way around. It's not that people exist to follow the laws.

John: Ok, so you are saying that each person should act according to his or her private standards. In that way, no one can impose their standards through laws. [Distorting someone's argument.]

Mike: I think there should be a consensus which standards we should implement as laws. That's why we have different declarations which say that the human dignity of every person is to be respected in every way. Therefore, laws should be made in a way that recognizes human dignity and protects each person's rights. [Being consistent in your positions.]

John: You are just trying to be smart in front of us. We are not in school yet. You can't get an A from us. [Attacking the person's character to discredit their argument.]

Lucy: Ok, I know what I said and what I saw yesterday, but how can we guarantee that leaders of countries will follow some objective standards and not their private ones? [Listening to different points of view. Being interested in truth more than in being right.]

John: I think that everyone should follow their own standards. There is no one truth that everyone should follow. Everyone who doesn't think this way obviously needs to educate himself more and stop being so rigid and try to impose their opinion. [Letting anger blur your judgment. Arguing that something is true simply because you say so.] Great philosophers would all agree. [Being intentionally ambiguous.]

Mike: Aren't the subjective moral standards the most problematic thing here? Isn't relativizing objective standards such as human dignity, the reason why these laws passed in the first place?

John: I know what I believe and this is that laws only limit people, they prevent us from being truly free. [Avoiding to answer a legitimate question. Discarding valid criticism because it makes you feel bad.]

Mike: Lucy, to be honest, I don't have all the answers. I think we should ask our history or ethics professor to help us with this problem. [Seeking advice from wise people.]

John: I don't see a need for that, I believe I am right and nothing can change it. [Arguing that something is true simply because you say so.]

Lucy: I thought of another problem with your opinion on this, Mike. What should the people do once this or any other immoral or unjust standard is enforced as law? For example, laws allowing slavery or racial segregation.

Mike: I know this is a problem. [Accepting valid criticism.] I guess what we should do is practice habits of excellent thinking in order to determine which laws are just before bringing them. But, if our leaders enforce unjust laws which don't respect human dignity, then we probably shouldn't follow them.

Lucy: OK, maybe this makes sense. Maybe a complete absence of laws could lead to chaotic behavior. [Thinking about the consequences of your ideas and actions.] So maybe my views are wrong, but still, I can't say I completely agree with you. [Considering if I might be wrong.] I definitely need to do more research. [Gathering enough evidence.] I think there is a potential of misuse in all of this.

Mike: Definitely, but it can't be any better if there are no laws. I think that just laws can help us to know what is right and wrong. They also hold us responsible for our actions. And they protect the most vulnerable among us, those who cannot protect themselves. These are all good things we shouldn't easily discard. [Being consistent in your positions.]

Lucy: I guess you are right, I will think about it more thoroughly to consider everything that you were saying. [Being open-minded.]

John: Ok, our class starts in one minute. We'll have to finish this later.

FOR REVIEW

Mohandas Gandhi: Devotion to Truth⁹

The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat, which means “being”. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth.

Devotion to this Truth gives us the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this state in the pilgrim’s progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without any effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word Satya or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action.

But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing in everyone following Truth according to their own lights. Indeed, it is their duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of anyone following Truth, it will automatically be set right. For the quest of Truth involves tapas – self suffering, sometimes even death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such Selfless search for Truth nobody can lose their bearings for long. When they take the wrong path and stumble, they are redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true bhakti (devotion). It is the path that leads to God.

How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to the Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price. May God be so to every one of us.

⁹ Truth by M.K. Gandhi, *Mahatma Gandhi Center*. At James Madison University, available at https://www.jmu.edu/gandhicerter/wm_library/gandhiana-truth.pdf (last visited Nov 8, 2022).



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