

MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AT RUDOLF STEINER (WALDORF) SCHOOLS

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MAHATMA GANDHI

The man and his message

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1 – Appointment with Death

It was Friday, January 30th, 1948: just a few months after India had finally become independent. Gandhi got up early as usual, at about 3.30 am. He prayed, had his bath, and then began work.

The morning passed. Gandhi had a simple meal of fruit, cooked and raw vegetables and some goat's milk. Then he slept for an hour. Late in the afternoon an old friend came to see him. As the two men talked on, Abha – one of Gandhi's two great-nieces who looked after him – hovered around anxiously. Gandhi was due to go to a prayer meeting, and he was already late. At last Gandhi got ready to leave. The prayer meeting was only a short distance away. But Gandhi was an old man now, and he could no longer walk easily without the help of Abha and his other great-niece, Manu. 5 10

As the three of them made their way towards the prayer meeting, he was a little impatient. "Let's hurry," Gandhi told them. "I don't like to keep people waiting." 15

The huge garden was crowded with people who had come to see him. Excitement grew as he approached. "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!*" the crowd shouted. "Long live Mahatma Gandhi!"

Gandhi was now only a few yards from the wooden platform, from which he was going to lead the prayers. 20

As he approached, a young man stepped out of the crowd. He put the palms of his hands together in front of him in the traditional Hindu greeting. Gandhi paused and smiled.

Then, before anyone realised what was happening, the young man took out a small pistol and pointed it at Gandhi. He fired three shots. Each one found its mark. 25

Gandhi's body crumpled. "*He Rama!*" he cried as he fell to the ground. "Oh God!" He died almost at once.

2 – Family Life

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2nd, 1869, in Porbandar, a small seaport on the Arabian Sea in Western India. At that time Porbandar was the capital of a tiny princely state, where Gandhi's father was *diwan*, the ruler's prime minister and chief adviser.

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Karamchand, Gandhi's father, was not highly educated, but he had a reputation for being incorruptible and tactful. He had been married four times. Two of his wives had died, the third was childless and Gandhi himself was the youngest son of the fourth and last wife, Putlibai. Gandhi was devoted to his mother, and she was a great influence on his life.

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Putlibai was a kind, simple woman, who had never learned to read and write. The two most important things in her life were her family and her religion. She took over and looked after her husband's already numerous family, cooking and working for all of them and nursing them when they fell ill.

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Putlibai prayed before every meal and, in spite of all the work in the house, found time to visit the temple every day. She fasted a good deal too, and then she ate only one meal a day.

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Putlibai was a strict orthodox Hindu and never questioned what her religion taught her. According to Hinduism, for example, many people in India were "Untouchable". The "Untouchables" were the lowest of the low; they swept the streets and did all the dirty jobs in the house. They were regarded as unclean: they could contaminate a person or food through contact. And this contamination had to be cleansed through prayer and bathing.

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For Putlibai, such beliefs were part of her religion.

Gandhi's lifelong struggle against the idea of "Untouchability" began with an act of youthful rebellion. He used to play with the "sweeper boy", who was called Uka. Uka was, of course, an "Untouchable".

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One day, Putlibai caught the two boys playing together, and

Natal Congress Party. The man refused: he was ready to spend lavishly on entertainment, but not on politics.

Gandhi was determined because this man would serve as an example: if he gave generously, others would follow. So he declined to eat anything until the man paid up, and since he was the guest of honour, no one else could eat either. The guests got hungrier and hungrier as Gandhi passed the time talking. Finally, as daybreak came, their host agreed to pay the extra money – and everyone was able to eat. 5

Gandhi worked hard to cut across religious barriers – Hindu, Muslim, Parsee and Christian – and at the same time to get the rich Indian merchants to recognise that the poor Indian labourers were part of the same community. For three years he crusaded endlessly for the rights of Indians, using lectures, meetings, petitions, pamphlets and an endless stream of letters to the press. But he realised that he needed still more time, so in 1896, he went back to India to fetch his wife and family. 15

7 – Satyagraha: The Fight against Repression

[Gandhi soon returned to South Africa. He pressed ahead with his fight for Indian rights, and kept up the struggle until war broke out between the British and the Boers in 1899. During the war Gandhi organised Indian volunteers for ambulance work. The volunteers often carried out their duties in the front line and under heavy fire, and many were later decorated for their bravery. But in 1901, after the fighting had ended, the situation of the Indians began to grow even worse than it had been before. Gandhi tried to persuade the British to influence the South African government, but he met with no success. In 1906 a new law was proposed, which would require Indians to carry a special registration card with their name and fingerprints at all times. It seemed to put them on the same level as criminals! Gandhi began to organise opposition. The Registration Act became law in 1907: all Indians had to register 20
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within thirty days. Through a journal which Gandhi had helped to set up, Indians were told not to go to the new registration offices.]

The call not to register was a great success: only about five hundred Indians in all turned up at the permit offices. Gandhi
5 and one hundred and fifty others were arrested and sent to gaol.

While he was in prison, Gandhi was invited to meet General Smuts, one of the leading politicians. Smuts promised Gandhi that, if Indians registered voluntarily, the government would re-
peal the act.

10 Gandhi maintained that they had to trust Smuts. He registered, and other Indians followed his example. But the law was not repealed, and the Indians were caught in the trap which the politicians had set for them. Gandhi's reply to the government was simple but effective: he called upon the Indians to make a bonfire
15 of their registration certificates.

So the struggle went on. New regulations were introduced and defied. Hundreds of Indians were arrested and sent to prison. This time they were sentenced to hard labour.

20 But as the struggle dragged on, support began to show signs of weakening. Gandhi became concerned for the families of his *satyagrahis*, many of whom had been in prison for a long time. He had to find somewhere for them to stay.

Luckily a friend came to his rescue. A rich German architect bought a farm outside Johannesburg and gave it to his Indian
25 friends. Gandhi was thus able to settle all the prisoners' dependents there. He called the settlement *Tolstoi Farm*.

The signal for the final stage of the struggle was soon given. In 1913, the Supreme Court of Cape Colony ruled that only Christian marriages would be recognised as valid in South Africa. In effect,
30 this made all Indian women concubines and all their children illegitimate!

The labourers were now joined, for the first time, by the women, Kasturbai among them.

12 – A Pinch of Salt

When Gandhi came out of prison in 1924, he was faced with changes in the political situation. A serious problem was that Hindu-Muslim unity had broken down. There had been a time, before Gandhi went to gaol, when Hindus and Muslims worked together for the common cause of independence. But now both groups had begun to provoke one another again. Riots broke out; Hindus and Muslims killed one another and tension began to rise. 5

Gandhi, in India as much as in South Africa, had always felt strongly about Hindu-Muslim unity. He could not understand why Hindus and Muslims should be so intolerant towards one another. 10

To give publicity to the issue, Gandhi announced a twenty-one day fast, to begin on September 18th, 1924.

This had an immediate effect. A “Unity Conference” was called in Delhi, which passed resolutions condemning violence and other provocative acts such as compulsory conversion. Gandhi agreed to break his fast. For the moment, there was peace between the two communities. 15

For the next three years, Gandhi withdrew from the political scene. He travelled extensively throughout India, speaking on problems such as child marriage, Untouchability and spinning. 20

This last topic was his favourite and most constant theme. Increasingly, he saw the production of *khadi* (homespun cloth) as a major solution to the country’s economic problems, as a way of providing work and a small income for the millions of unemployed in the rural areas. 25

Gandhi wanted everyone to spin; he also wanted everyone to buy and wear *khadi*, particularly people in towns: it would be a way of repaying their debt to the peasants on whom they depended. Homespun cloth became the badge of the Indian nationalist and even the aristocratic Nehrus took to wearing it. 30

[The years from 1927-1929 saw long arguments between Indian leaders and the British on the question of independence for India. Finally talks broke down.]

5 The Congress Conference at the end of December 1929 resolved that civil disobedience should start again and it was left to Gandhi to work out how and when.

10 Gandhi's idea was brilliantly simple, like so many others in the past. His plan was that Indians must break the Salt Law by making their own salt. Salt was a government monopoly and there was a tax on it. It was a tax that everyone – rich and poor – had to pay because everyone needed salt. But it was an especially unfair tax because it was a much greater burden for the poor.

15 Gandhi, with real theatrical instinct, announced that he himself would give a signal for breaking the law. He would march from the Sabarmati ashram to the sea together with a select band of *satyagrahis*. There, at a place called Dandi, he would take a pinch of salt from the sea. This would be a signal for the rest of India to begin breaking the law.

20 But first he wrote a long letter to the Viceroy, warning him that civil disobedience was about to start again and explaining the reasons. The Viceroy did not take Gandhi's scheme very seriously. Like many of Gandhi's own supporters, the British did not fully appreciate what Gandhi proposed to do.

25 On March 12th, 1930, the sixty-one-year-old Gandhi set off with his band of seventy-eight followers on the two hundred and forty mile march to the sea. Each day they walked twelve miles. The *mahatma* walked so fast that many of his younger followers could not keep up with him.

30 At night they stopped at one of the villages on the route. Here Gandhi explained the purpose of the march to the villagers who gathered round to listen to him. He also addressed them on his other favourite themes – child marriage, Untouchability and spin-

Shortly after Kasturbai's death, Gandhi himself became seriously ill. The doctors diagnosed a number of diseases and, although he gradually recovered, his general physical condition remained weak, and the British decided that it would be safer to release him from gaol.

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Gandhi never went to prison again. Altogether he had spent more than six years of his life in gaol: two hundred and forty-nine days in South Africa and two thousand and eighty-nine in India.

17 – Independence

The year: 1945. The war in Europe and Asia was over and, in England, the newly-elected Labour government resolved to give India its independence.

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But there were many obstacles. The Muslim League was insisting on a separate state for Muslims. Gandhi wanted to keep India united, while the British wanted a solution that was quick and also met with everyone's approval.

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There was a good deal of unrest in the country at the time. The war had brought higher prices and food shortages. Bengal had suffered a famine in which a million and a half people had died.

The situation was already tense when the Muslim League called for a "Direct Action" day on August 16th, 1946. In the communal riots that followed, Muslims butchered Hindus and Hindus butchered Muslims. On a single day of violence in Calcutta more than five thousand people died.

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To try to restore some peace to the two communities, Gandhi went to live in a small village in East Bengal. It was a largely Muslim village; the Hindus who had once lived there had fled when trouble broke out. Gandhi spent six weeks in the village, living his usual life of prayer and hard work, but at the same time talking hard to members of the Muslim community. Gradually peace returned.

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In January 1947, Gandhi announced that he would begin a tour of East Bengal on foot.

"I will walk through Bengal," he said, "and I will speak to every Indian I meet. And I will teach him about peace and love."

5 After a lifetime of preaching non-violence, this was the only way Gandhi could see of getting his message across.

So, at the age of seventy-seven, barefooted, he set off on a pilgrimage through Bengal. Villages were burning and everywhere people were fighting and killing one another. Unafraid, Gandhi
10 continued to preach his message of peace.

Two months later, he did the same in the province of Bihar, where Hindus had savagely attacked Muslim minorities.

Meanwhile, the politicians continued to wrangle.

Finally, in February 1947, the British government announced a
15 date for Indian independence: "not later than June 1948". The creation of a new state for Muslims, to be called Pakistan, was now regarded as inevitable. Gandhi was still opposed in principle to partition, but he did not oppose the final plan. He now concentrated his whole attention on practical problems. The division of
20 India into two countries meant that millions of people would have to leave their homes. His judgement on partition was based on human suffering rather than political values.

On Independence Day on August 15th, 1947, Gandhi had already left for East Bengal, where further violence was anticipated.
25 He got as far as Calcutta, where he decided to stay in the house of a poor Muslim workman in a neighbourhood that was almost entirely Hindu.

Soon he was surrounded by angry Hindu demonstrators, unable to understand his support for their Muslim enemies. But Gandhi not only managed to pacify the mob. He also persuaded Hindus and Muslims to celebrate Independence Day together.
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But peace between the two communities was fragile. Violence broke out again when news of massacres of Hindus in the Punjab reached Calcutta. At one point, Gandhi's own life was in dan-

“Never take anything for gospel truth,” he once said, “even if it comes from a *mahatma!*”

Gandhi’s life was a series of experiments in search of truth, both in his public and private life. “I have nothing new to tell the world,” he once wrote. “Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.” 5

To people who looked to him for a “message”, he had a very simple answer.

“Study my life,” he told them. “My life is my message.”

19 – A Calendar of the Main Events in Gandhi’s Life

- 1869 Born in Porbandar (Western India) on October 2.
- 1882 Married to Kasturbai at the age of thirteen.
- 1888 Goes to England to study law.
- 1891 Returns to India, (aged 21) qualified as a barrister.
- 1893 Goes to work in South Africa and experiences racial prejudice at Maritzburg. Organises Indians in Pretoria to resist racial discrimination.
- 1894 Invited to stay in Natal to fight anti-Indian legislation. Organises opposition and becomes known as protector of the poor Indian labourers.
- 1896 Returns to India to fetch his family. Makes speeches about the South Africa problem. Is attacked by white mob on his return to South Africa. Continues the fight for the rights of Indians for the next three years, but also establishes himself as a successful lawyer.
- 1900 Organises ambulance relief work on behalf of the British in their fight against the Boers (1899-1902).
- 1901 Returns to India and sets up law practice in Bombay. Makes contact with Indian political leaders.

- 1902 Called back to South Africa and resumes fight against repression.
- 1904 Sets up Phoenix Farm, his first experiment in community living.
- 1906 Organises resistance to the Registration Act and teaches non-violent resistance. The struggle continues over the next few years.
- 1911 Establishes Tolstoi Farm as a refuge for his *satyagrahis* (non-violent resistance fighters).
- 1912 Gokhale, a leading Indian politician, visits South Africa. Smuts promises to repeal the Registration Act (but does not).
- 1913 Cape Colony Supreme Court declares non-Christian marriages illegal. Gandhi, helped by Indian women, organises resistance. World opinion obliges South Africa to negotiate rights for Indian community.
- 1914 Gandhi visits England at outbreak of First World War (1914-1918), in which India helps Britain with money and troops.
- 1915 Returns to India (at the age of forty-five) and tours the country to get to know India's problems. Sets up the Sabarmati *ashram* near Ahmedabad.
- 1917 Intervenes in dispute between peasants and landlords in Bihar and in dispute between workers and mill owners in Ahmedabad. First political fast and the beginning of *satyagraha* in India.
- 1918 Organises peasant resistance to the British government in Kheda.
- 1919 Rowlatt Act restricts Indian civil liberties. Gandhi organises all-India one-day peaceful strike. Jallianwalla massacre in Amritsar.
- 1920 Gandhi initiates non-cooperation campaign.

to reflect	to think, meditate, or ponder	<i>h</i> : nachdenken, -sinnen
to recognise	to see, to realise	(an)erkennen, einsehen langsam klarwerden im Sinn haben
to have in mind	to have in one's thoughts	
to discover	to find out	entdecken
to regard	to think of, to see, to consider	betrachten
outcome	result	Ergebnis
to result in	to end in a particular way	enden in
to cause	to be the reason for	verursachen
to go along with	to accept	hinnehmen
to ignore	to disregard; to pay no attention to	absichtlich übersehen
to dismiss	to see (sth) as unimportant	(als wertlos) abtun
inconsistent	erratic; not regular or predictable	inkonsequent, wechselhaft

Movement, Action

to approach	to go or come nearer	s. nähern
to collapse	to fall down	einstürzen, zusammen- brechen
to attend school	to go to school	die Schule besuchen
exercise	physical activity	körperliche Bewegung
to resume	to start again	wiederaufnehmen
to act	to do sth	handeln
	to serve, to function	fungieren
to take sth up	to begin (a habit, a hobby etc)	mit etwas beginnen (Gewohnheit, Hobby)
to knock (on)	to hit (a door) with your hand so that smn will open it	klopfen (an)
to retreat from	to leave, to turn away, to withdraw	s. zurückziehen von
to turn up	to appear, to arrive	auftauchen
to drag on	to proceed (=go on) slowly	schleppend vorangehen
to abandon	to leave (behind)	verlassen
to accompany	to go or occur together with	begleiten
to take to doing	to begin doing sth regularly	es s. angewöhnen, etwas zu tun
to keep up with	to walk as fast as	Schritt halten mit
to remove	to take away	beseitigen, aus dem Weg räumen

Talking, Asking, Persuading

audience	people who watch or listen to sth happening	Zuhörer, Publikum
lecture	a speech to teach people about sth (often in a university)	Vortrag
topic	subject	Thema
account	report; narrative	Bericht, Erzählung
to question	to ask to doubt, to oppose, to challenge	fragen in Frage stellen
to beg	(1) to ask for money; (2) to ask earnestly	(1) betteln; (2) (an)flehen
to observe	to say, to remark	bemerken
to admit	to confess, to concede, to acknowledge	zugeben
to concede a point	to agree to a point reluctantly (=unwillingly)	(in einem Punkt) nachgeben
to propose	to suggest	vorschlagen
to insist on	to be firm or resolute in demanding sth	bestehen auf
to assert	to insist on, to stand up for, to uphold	behaupten
to maintain	to declare, to say sth as one's opinion	behaupten, die Auffassung vertreten
to advise	to say what you think smn should do	beraten
to inform	to tell, to give information to	mitteilen
to preach	to speak publicly in a sermon	predigen
to influence	to move, to persuade	beeinflussen
to negotiate	to try to reach an agreement	verhandeln
to persuade	to convince; to make smn decide to do sth	überreden
to convince	to persuade, to make smn believe	überzeugen
(un)convinced	(not) persuaded, (not) satisfied	(nicht) überzeugt
to urge	to try hard to persuade; to press	drängen
to encourage	to give (smn) hope or confidence	ermutigen, Mut machen
to approve	to accept officially; to think sth is good, right or suitable	bewilligen; gutheißen
to meet with approval	to be seen as right or good	Zustimmung finden
to argue	to quarrel to maintain; to say (giving reasons)	s. streiten behaupten
to threaten	The workers <i>threatened</i> a one-day strike.	(an-, be-)drohen
to blame	to accuse; to say or think smn is responsible	die Schuld geben
to condemn	to express disapproval of	verurteilen
to object	to protest, to argue	einwenden
blunt	direct; frank and open	offen, schonungslos

Comprehension Questions

How to work on these questions

- The 'a'-questions can usually be answered in one sentence, directly from the text.
- Generally speaking, the 'b'-questions will need somewhat longer answers – perhaps two, three or four sentences.
- The 'c'-questions typically demand a summary or a retelling of events. The specific lengths asked for mean it is mostly better to use your own words. Also, you will have to decide on priorities – which ideas are really important; which are interesting but not asked for by the question and so on. If you just quote from the text, you will often find that your work is too long, or that you have no room left for important ideas.

Chapter 1 – Appointment with Death

- A1. What did Gandhi do after getting up in the morning?
- A2. What did he eat for his midday meal?
- A3. Why did Abha feel anxious?
- A4. Why did Abha and Manu help Gandhi to walk to the meeting?
- A5. Why was Gandhi impatient?
- A6. What did the young man do first after stepping forward?
- A7. Who killed Gandhi?
- B1. How did Gandhi spend Friday, January 30th, 1948?
- B2. Describe the sequence of events before the prayer meeting: how Gandhi went there, why he was late and the reaction of the crowd.
- B3. How was the attack on Gandhi carried out?
- c1. Summarize the chapter, using about 100–150 words.

Chapter 2 – Family Life

- A1. When and where was Gandhi born?
- A2. What was his father's job?
- A3. How did Gandhi feel towards his mother?
- A4. What were the most important things in Putlibai's life?
- A5. What things show us that she was very strict about her religion?

- A6. What did she think of the Untouchables?
- A7. What did Gandhi think of them?
- B1. What does the text tell us about Gandhi's father?
- B2. Describe Putlibai's attitude towards religion, and give some examples.
- B3. Who were the Untouchables, and how did other Hindus see them?
- B4. What was Gandhi's "act of youthful rebellion"?
- c1. What do we learn about Gandhi's mother? Write a description of her using not more than 100 words.

Chapter 3 – Schooldays in India

- A1. Who chose the young girl that Gandhi married?
- A2. Why did Gandhi get married when he was so young?
- A3. How did Gandhi feel about his coming marriage?
- A4. Where did the couple live after the wedding?
- A5. Why did Gandhi lose his temper with Kasturbai?
- A6. What vices did Gandhi have as a boy?
- A7. Why was Gandhi not with his father when he died?
- B1. What kind of boy was the young Gandhi?
- B2. How did the young couple live after the wedding?
- B3. How did Gandhi behave towards Kasturbai at the beginning of their marriage?
- B4. What does the text tell us about Gandhi's attitude to meat?
- c1. Write 100–150 words on Gandhi and Kasturbai: how their marriage came about and their relationship during these early years.

Chapter 4 – A Student in London

- A1. How long did Gandhi spend in London?
- A2. What were his eating habits?
- A3. What were the results of his university examinations?
- A4. What did he discover when he arrived back in India?
- A5. Why had the family not told him about Putlibai's death?
- B1. How did Gandhi's years in London change him?