

Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi is considered by many to be the greatest spiritual and political leader of the early twentieth century. He is also considered by the people of India to be the father of their nation. There he is called the Mahatma, Great Soul.

Gandhi lived his life in a search for truth, and he believed that truth could only be found through compassion and tolerance of others. Further, he believed that truthful solutions to problems could always be found if one persevered.

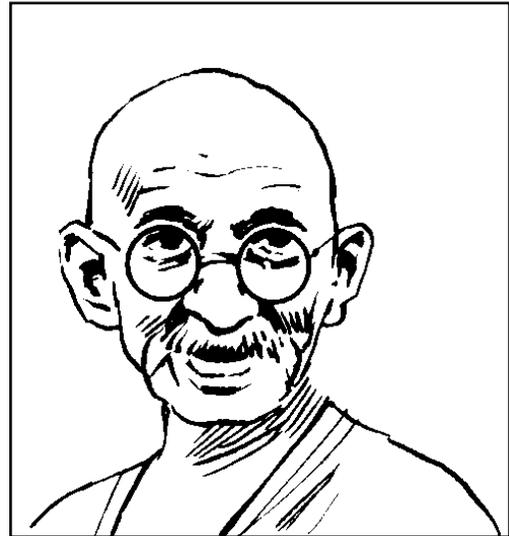
Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, India. Shy and serious, he married his wife, Kasturba, at the age of thirteen through an arranged marriage. The couple had four children. Gandhi studied law in London and returned to India in 1891 to practice. Two years later, he went to South Africa to do legal work, but he met with great discrimination, as did most Indians although they were British subjects and South Africa was under British rule.

Although he was assigned to South Africa for only one year, he remained for twenty-one years to fight discrimination. He developed a method of using passive resistance and noncooperation to effect social change. This method, which he called *Satyagraha* (truth and firmness) was based in part on the teachings of Christ and the works of Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau. He stressed the need for honor; the way people behaved was of the utmost importance.

After his years in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India where he quickly became the leader of the Indian nationalist movement. He led the people in a fight of nonviolent resistance and protest to British rule. Often he fasted in protest, and he was jailed several times, but no matter what, he persevered.

Eventually, after many years, India did gain its independence. However, the nation split in two and Hindus, Muslims, and other groups fought against one another. Gandhi turned his nonviolent protests to the cause of uniting all groups in harmony. Ironically, while on the way to a prayer meeting, an assassin's bullet killed this man of peace just twelve days after religious leaders agreed to stop fighting.

About Gandhi, Albert Einstein is quoted as having said, "Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood."



Suggested Activities

British Empire In the early twentieth century, the British Empire held lands around the world, among them India and South Africa. Find out more about this period of time and what eventually happened to the vast empire.

Animal Rights Gandhi believed that it was morally wrong to kill animals for food or clothing. Discuss your views on this subject.

Marriage In Gandhi's culture and among his caste (socio-economic level in India), arranged marriage was common and the age of thirteen for marriage was not considered young. Research to learn about marriage in other parts of the world at this time as well as the practices of marriage around the world today. Chart the comparisons.

Social Leaders Compare Gandhi to other leaders who have urged nonviolent protest, most notably Martin Luther King, Jr.