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**Elementary School: 3rd
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IndiaFEST 2010– Essay Contest

Gandhi, the Great Leader

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi often called Gandhiji, or Bapu (father), or Mahatma (great soul) was a very kind-hearted, polite, and also very influential man. He was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, India. Mohandas was 13 when his parents arranged his marriage with a girl named Kasturbai, whom he had four children with. Unfortunately, not all of his children lived to see adulthood. After high school he went to study medicine at a local university, but he failed and was forced to quit within five months. His family then sent him to England to study law at University College in London. When leaving for London he promised his parents that he will be a vegetarian and will not any kind of meat. Being a vegetarian was hard for Gandhi, because there were not many vegetarian restaurants where he lived. At his college, Gandhi learned all English laws, but he did not learn one law about his own country. After graduating from law school, Gandhi went to South Africa to learn the problems of discrimination with Indian people in Pretoria, South Africa.

Immediately after arriving in South Africa Gandhi brought together the Indian community to work on the anti-democracy bill that would give them right to vote. He drew up an enormous petition which was signed by ten thousand people in two weeks. This petition was sent to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies. He formed a group of people called the Natal Indian Congress to fight for the rights of Indian discrimination. He then went to India to bring his wife and two sons to live with him in Natal. Upon his return to South Africa, the whites were throwing stones, bricks, and rotten eggs at him. Several days later the Natal authorities asked Gandhi to identify his assailants so they could be prosecuted. His refusal to defend himself and identify his assailants shamed the whites, and won some of them to his side. It was one of the first victories for Gandhi's policy of nonviolence. He also organized a large group of Indian people in a town square where he burned identification papers issued by the South African government to protest discrimination. For this act he was beaten and harassed badly by authorities.

Very little has been written about the contribution of Indian people in the "Boer War" which took place during 1899-1902. Once again Gandhi's leadership led him to form the ambulance corps. They usually hauled wounded off the field and away from the

direct line of fire. He and other leaders received medals for the ambulance corps. There is a memorial erected to honor Indian people who were part of the ambulance corps. Gandhi then left South Africa to bring his wife and children to Mumbai and returned to South Africa. He often shuttled back and forth between Durban and Johannesburg. Though, he set up a law office in Johannesburg to work for his people. Gandhi also formed a group of people called the Satyagrahis and achieved his fight of non-violence in South Africa. He had a strong belief that it would be the only forceful way to fight the British.

When Gandhi returned to India he became the leader of the National Indian Congress and started the Home Rule Movement. The purpose of the Home Rule Movement was for India to have self-government within the British Empire. The British were putting tax on salt so Gandhi was going on a march with his “satyagrahis” to collect salt themselves and protest the salt tax. They did this for the nation’s fight of self-government. After midnight between May fourth and fifth in 1930 the police came, arrested, and prisoned Gandhi. Gandhi was then released from prison on January 1931. Gandhi’s final act was the Quit India movement. This movement’s idea was to set up an arrangement of non-violent ways for India’s independence. The movement had a rocky start because before British Congress could pass it, the British government proclaimed it illegal and arrested major leaders including Gandhi. He was held for two years and during this time, his fifty-year old secretary Mahadev Desai, died, as well as his wife Kasturba. Gandhi also suffered a malaria attack. Then he was released before the end of the World War One and because of his failing health, the British government did not want him to die in prison and aggravate the country. At the end of World War One the British gave clear announcements that power would be given to Indian hands. Finally Gandhi won the independence of India and called off the struggle. This was the only war that was fought without weapons, but with Gandhi’s preachings of non-violence. Sadly, Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi was shot by Nathuram Godse. Gandhi’s last words were “Hey Ram!” (Oh god!)

Gandhi’s prayers and preachings have showed me the righteous way of how to live a good life without any violence.