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# Mahatma Gandhi

1869 – 1948

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most revered people of the twentieth century. In India he is commemorated on 2nd October which was his birthday. This script reviews a selection of the events of his life.

## Characters

Gandhi  
Gandhi's father  
Gandhi's mother  
Kasturba, his wife  
Magistrate  
Ticket collector  
Clerk  
A friend  
Judge  
A few poor farmers  
President Nehru  
People in the crowd  
Lots of narrators

*(The class are on stage in an arc at the back. They step forward to play their part.)*

- N** Good morning and welcome to our assembly. Our class would like to tell you about Mahatma Gandhi. He was a Hindu leader who led his people to oppose unfair laws and to get Independence from Britain for India.
- N** When he was born, his name was Mohondas Karamchand Gandhi. He was born in Porbandar in Gujarat on 2nd October 1869. His father was a diwan or chief minister of the town. This means that Mohondas was born into the Vaishyas or third class of the caste system.
- N** What is a caste system?
- N** In India, at that time, there was a caste system which had lasted for at least two thousand years. Their whole race was divided into five castes or classes. The top one was the Brahmins who were priests and scholars. The second were the Kshatriyas, the warriors and rulers. Third were Vaishayas the traders and merchants and fourth were the Shudras who were labourers and servants. At the bottom of the system were the Untouchables who did the worst jobs like cleaning toilets. You could not get out of your caste and you were only allowed to do the jobs of that caste and marry people of the same caste. Gandhi hated the caste system because it was so unfair.

**Gandhi's mother**

Remember, Mohondas, it is important never to harm anyone else or any living creature. A good Hindu always respects people of every other race and religion in the world. You only eat vegetarian food and it is important to fast occasionally to drive impurities from the body. Remember this always.

**Gandhi** Yes, Mother, I will.

**Gandhi's father**

And now, Mohandas, we have some good news for you. We have spoken to our friends, the Makhanjis. They have a lovely daughter called Kasturba. So we have arranged for you to marry her. Now that you are thirteen we think you are old enough. We will, of course, allow you to meet her before you are married.

**Gandhi** Oh. Thank you father.

*(Kasturba enters stage and walks up to Gandhi. They smile at each other.)*

**N** And so Gandhi was married. This did not stop him going to school and college. He went to university in Bombay, as his father wanted him to be a barrister. He did not like it much but he leapt at the opportunity to go to London University the month before his nineteenth birthday.

**N** When he got to England, he studied English customs and other religions like Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam.

**N** He returned to India to work as a lawyer, but he did not have much luck and so in 1893, Gandhi set off for Natal in South Africa to work for an Indian company for a year. Here he encountered racial prejudice for the first time.

*(A court scene)*

**Magistrate** *(looking at Gandhi with disapproval)*  
Remove that turban!

**Gandhi** Why?

**Magistrate** This is South Africa. You do not dress like that here.

**Gandhi** I have every right to wear my turban.

**Magistrate** No you haven't. Take it off or leave at once.

**Gandhi** I'm not staying here. *(He storms off in disgust)*

**N** Gandhi found racial prejudice everywhere. One day on a train...

*(Ticket collector enters and sees Gandhi sitting on a seat.)*

**Ticket collector**

What are you doing here?

**Gandhi** I am travelling to Natal. Here is my ticket.

**Ticket collector**

You're not allowed in first class.

**Gandhi** Why not? I have paid my fare.

**Ticket collector**

Black people are not allowed in first class. Go down to third class with the rest of the blacks.

**Gandhi** No! I have paid my fare. I am not hurting anyone else. I am staying here.

*(Two ticket collectors grab Gandhi, taking an arm each and pulling him off the stage.)*

**N** It was hard to get hotel rooms if you were black.

*(A hotel reception. Gandhi enters)*

**Gandhi** I would like a room please.

**Clerk** No, we're full.

*(He turns to go and a white person comes in.)*

**Man** I would like a room, please.

**Clerk** Certainly, sir. I can give you a comfortable room with a view.

**N** Near the end of his year in South Africa, Gandhi was reading a newspaper one day.

**Gandhi** *(Reading)*

Look at this! The Government has passed a law saying that Indians are not allowed to vote.

**N** Gandhi and his friends protested. They started an organization called the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. They got the Indians in South Africa to act as one group of people, without their caste system, working together as a group to fight racism. Then the South African War started.

**Gandhi** *(Addressing the crowd)*

This is our chance to show everyone that we can be full citizens of South Africa. Let us get together and form a voluntary ambulance organization. We will pick up the wounded and take them to hospitals and treat wounded people as well as we can. If we show that we are able to play our part in being good citizens, surely they will give all Indians full citizenship when the war is over.

**N** Gandhi and the other Indians spent the war years working to support South Africa, but it did not help them to gain full citizens' rights. In fact after the war, things got worse for the Indians.

**Gandhi** *(Addressing a crowd)*

The South African Government has passed a law that all Indians have to register and carry identity cards. We will stand up to them, but we will do it peacefully. We will not obey this law. We will have peaceful protests but when the police come for us, we will never fight back. We will never use violence, even when they use it against us.

**N** For seven years, Gandhi and his supporters disobeyed the law. They refused to go to the registry offices and when identity cards were forced on them, they got together and burnt them in public. They were beaten and put in prison. The government was criticized heavily for using such dreadful punishments against people who were protesting peacefully. At last the government had to give in.

**N** Gandhi returned to India and soon took up the case of the poor. He visited the poor farmers in Champaram and Kheda.

**Gandhi** *(To a group of farmers who are weak with hunger)*

What is wrong?

**Farmer** We are starving. The British landlords forced us to grow indigo and won't allow us to grow food. We are becoming ill and we cannot feed our children. And now they are demanding a tax which we cannot possibly pay.

**N** Gandhi organized lots of his supporters and volunteers to come to the villages to help the people, bringing them food to get back to health. He also organized peaceful protests and at last the British landlords had to allow the farmers to grow. At this time the Indians began to call him 'Mahatma' which means a revered person and 'Bapu' which means father.

**Gandhi** *(Addressing the class who form the crowd, reading if necessary.)*  
We must persuade the British to leave India, but we must do it by peaceful means. There are causes for which I am prepared to die, but there is no cause, for which I am prepared to kill. We must never use violence. We must be a race of people who are all working together, rich and poor, men and women, people of all castes. We will disobey their laws and when they punish us, we will not fight back even if they are violent towards us. We will only buy food and materials which are made in India. We must never buy anything which is British made. We should spend a little time each day spinning our own cloth to make our own clothes. We must not go into British educational buildings or law courts. If anyone has a job working for the British Government, I ask you to leave it now. Let the British see that we will have nothing to do with them so they cannot possibly govern us. In the end by protesting peacefully, we will win and the British will have to go home.

*(Crowd cheers)*

**N** The Indians all joined in their campaign of peaceful disobedience. Occasionally there was violence and Gandhi, frightened that all his work would be undone, called off the campaign. The British thought him a trouble-maker and in 1922 they called him to court for sedition. That means persuading people to rebel against the government.

*(Enter Judge and Gandhi)*

**Judge** You have been found guilty of urging people to rebel against the state. I sentence you to six years in prison.

*(Gandhi is taken away)*

**N** Gandhi only spent two years in prison and when he came out, he spent a few years working to fight poverty, alcoholism and putting an end to the caste system. In 1928, he called on the British Government to get out of India or face a new campaign of civil disobedience from the Indians. The British did not answer, so Gandhi's party the Indian National Congress unfurled a flag of India in Lahore and declared Indian Independence. They then had a long protest march to the sea to protest against the British putting a tax on salt. As a result over 60,000 Indians were imprisoned.

**N** The British began to realize that they would not have any peace until they sat down with the Indians and made an agreement. Unfortunately the Indians did not get everything that Gandhi wanted and so the fighting went on. The protests often became violent although Gandhi was always opposed to violence.

*(Enter Gandhi's friend)*

**Friend of Gandhi**

Bapu, how can you be so opposed to people fighting to protect themselves. All we are doing is standing up for ourselves.

**Gandhi** When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has

always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem unbeatable, but in the end they always fall.

**Friend of Gandhi**

But Bapu, our people have been treated so cruelly by the British. Surely we cannot be blamed for wanting to have our own back.

**Gandhi** An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.

**N** At the end of the 2nd World War, the British Government gave permission for India to become completely independent from Britain. Gandhi was pleased that the British had handed over power to the Indians but he was sad that India was divided in India and Pakistan.

**N** On 30th January 1948, while on his way to the Mandir, Gandhi was shot and killed. President Nehru spoke of him on the radio.

**Nehru** Friends and comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere, and I do not know how to say it. Our dear leader, Bapu, as we called him, the father of the nation, is dead. We will never see him again. We will never again run to him for advice or comfort and that is a terrible blow for me and millions and millions in our country.

**N** Let us pray.  
Oh God, help us always to try to live our lives in a peaceful way. Help us to learn to sort out our quarrels with persuasion and without fighting.