

What is a Peacemaker? How Do They Solve Problems?

Janie D. Hubbard

If peace is what every government says it seeks, and peace is the yearning of every heart, why aren't we studying it and teaching it in schools?

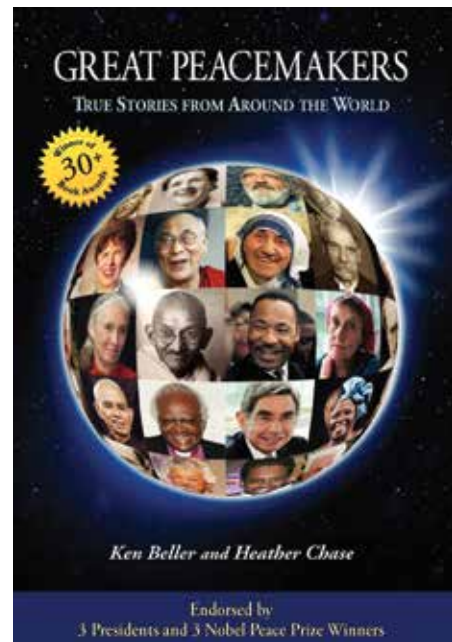
—Colman McCarthy, author and Washington Post columnist

Starting in fourth grade, the required history curriculum in many states emphasizes military conflicts (from the American Revolution up to the “War on Terrorism”). Students are expected to learn major events, battles, leaders, causes, alliances, opposing viewpoints, and consequences. These conflicts have a proper place in the curriculum; they have shaped and intensified economic, geographic, political, and cultural changes in this country and abroad. However, human rights education (which closely connects with the study of nonviolent conflict and peacemakers who work for a more just society) is often absent from, or minimized in, required state curriculum.¹

Meeting Standards and Choosing Rich Content

Teaching the concept of “peacemaker” can reflect all of the themes of the social studies standards,² but especially 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10.

While some private and international schools incorporate curricular benchmarks related to peace education (e.g., Brush Creek Montessori School, Friends School, Global Village School, International Montessori School), teachers in other institutions may want to identify and explain how peace education relates to state civics or character education standards. The College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards offers guidance and support for rigorous student learning through four dimensions of inquiry: 1) Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries; 2) Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools; 3) Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence; and 4) Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.³ Rich civic content urges students to analyze examples of ordinary people, as well as national leaders, as they have taken informed action and contributed to society. Teaching about peacemakers and peacemaking can connect to grade-specific indicators of the C3 Framework.⁴



National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Chapter 2—The Themes of Social Studies

- 1 CULTURE
- 2 TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE
- 3 PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS
- 4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY
- 5 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS
- 6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE
- 7 PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION
- 8 SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY
- 9 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS
- 10 CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Diverse Stories from Around the World

To teach the concept of “peacemaker,” I use the NCSS Notable Trade Book (2009) for Young People, *Great Peacemakers: True Stories from Around the World* by Ken Beller and Heather Chase.⁵ The book is separated into sections featuring 20 diverse individuals who have made peacemaking their life’s work. Each section includes a brief biography, a page of quotes, and a photograph. Peacemakers’ stories are organized into five approaches to creating peace: choosing nonviolence, living peace, honoring diversity, valuing all life, and caring for the planet.

The book fits well with culturally responsive teaching because the 20 selected peacemakers represent different genders, classes, races, ethnicities, cultures, and there are contemporary and historical examples that demonstrate inclusiveness. In addition, the book is easy to use with democratic teaching methods like choice, discussion, and cooperative grouping, as well as skill building activities, such as compare-contrast, analysis, synthesis, decision-making, and presentation. The lesson below is most appropriate for fifth and sixth graders because of the reading level of the biographies; however, teachers of younger students could revise the readings and activities to make them appropriate for their classroom.

Introducing Peacemakers

To begin the lesson and assess prior knowledge, I projected a series of five photos while asking students to consider this question, “Who are these people, and what do they have in common?” I gave students time to react when projecting each photo on a large screen. In my experience, most students guess at some names, but usually cannot recognize the first four people in the lineup:

Desmond Tutu (1931–)—A Nobel Peace Prize laureate best known for being the first black archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, an opponent of Apartheid, and an advocate for human rights and economic justice.

Bruno Hussar (1911–1996)—Best known for founding the “Oasis of Peace,” an Arab/Jewish village dedicated to coexistence. He also established the bilingual elementary School of Peace for Israeli Jewish and Palestinian children in the village.

Wangari Maathai (1940–2011)—Kenyan environmentalist, political activist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Best known for planting thousands of trees so as to restore the health of the land and advocating women’s rights.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)—American Abolitionist, antiwar activist, and author of the essay *On Civil Disobedience*, which coined that term. Best known for writing the New World classic *Walden, or Life in the Woods*.

Mother Theresa (1910–1997)—A Nobel Peace Prize laureate best known for serving the desperately poor in Calcutta, India.

Students have always recognized Mother Theresa by name and often said, “She helps the poor,” which stimulated more discussion about Mother Theresa’s work. Next, we returned to the original question, “Who are these people, and what do they have in common?” Students hypothesized that all of these people serve others in some way.

I introduced the book *Great Peacemakers* and explained how it is organized. I said that the book has won over 30 awards and described how the authors selected the 20 peacemakers (as explained in the introduction of the book, p. xi). I asked students why, did they think we were studying the concept of peacemakers? Generally, students are puzzled by that question. Responses have ranged from “Peace is important” to “We need to learn about peace.” For these students, studying peacemakers has apparently been a new concept.

I then asked the class to name leaders from wars, and having recently studied the Civil War, students offer the examples of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Sometimes, students name George Washington, George Custer, George Patton, or Adolf Hitler. It is worth pointing out that some of the American military heroes our students mention also showed great skill as peacetime leaders (e.g., Presidents Washington and Grant), navigating the troubled waters of domestic politics and diplomacy with other nations—and, arguably, preventing violent conflicts from occurring.

After this discussion, it is usually clear to students why I have chosen to teach about peacemakers. They realize that their prior knowledge about war and warriors far exceeds what they know about peace and peacemakers. Beyond what they learn in school, much of what students learn about these topics may be attributed to movies and TV, as well as to national holidays, which in many countries tend to focus on military accomplishments.⁶

A Graphic Organizer

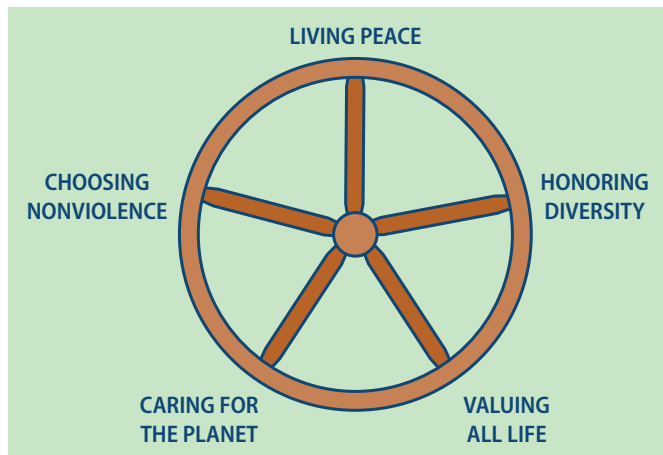
Next, I divided the class into jigsaw groups of three to four students each, and gave each group a piece of butcher paper and markers. I made multiple copies of the book available, so different groups could examine various brief biographies, including the photographs and quotation pages. I instructed each group to select the biography, read and discuss the material, and use the butcher paper and markers to create a stick-figure graphic organizer to display key information about that person (**HANDOUTS A and B**, pages 9 and 10) such as his or her thoughts (and sources of their ideas), vision (image of a better society), spoken and written words, physical actions, feelings during key events in their lives, and personal challenges or weaknesses. The blank space underneath the stick figure is reserved for background information such as birthplace, home, peers and collaborators, or pertinent dates.

I take care to explain that much of the information needed to create the graphic organizer poster is not “right there” in the text; much is derived from group reading, discussion, inference, negotiation, and decision-making. If students would benefit from a modeling of the activity, the teacher may create a poster,

with the class participating, using information about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Most students have studied King throughout the elementary years and can recall enough background knowledge to assist the teacher in creating a model poster.

A Wheel Diagram

When groups were about halfway through the task and had a clear understanding of the peacemaker their group chose to study, I halted work and displayed the “Approaches to Peace” wheel on the large screen. Each spoke on the web contains one of five approaches to peace adopted by peacemakers.



After a half hour or so, each group had analyzed the biographic content and formulated group conclusions regarding their peacemaker. While half of the members of each group completed their peacemaker poster, the other group members used the information they discussed to complete their section of a class matrix of all of the peacemakers under study. For this wall matrix, group members wrote on four 4 × 10 inch horizontal strips of paper: their peacemaker’s country of origin, approach to peace, contributions to society, and character traits. Each group’s papers were placed vertically on the matrix, one underneath another for comparison.

Each group introduced a selected peacemaker by presenting their stick-figure graphic organizer to the whole class. I encouraged the rest of the class to formulate and ask questions following the presentations. Each group then moved to the wall matrix to further discuss and compare various peacemakers and historic events. Groups often grapple with trying to explain, in a nutshell, how the peacemaker contributed to society. I prompted students to share evidence to support their conclusions and generalizations, particularly about their conceptions of each peacemaker’s contributions to society and his or her character traits.

As they compare various peacemakers, students often are surprised that many character traits are similar (e.g., persistent, passionate, inspirational, resilience after failure), even though these people were regular human beings with various personal and professional challenges. For example, some peacemakers were incarcerated for their beliefs and actions (e.g., Nelson

Mandela; Martin Luther King, Jr.) and others suffered discrimination and difficult health and family issues (e.g., Rachel Carson; Wangari Maathai). Along the way, students can also learn about the Nobel Peace Prize and some of its recipients, such as the young Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, co-winner of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize.⁷



(Russell Watkins/Department for International Development)

On October 10, 2014, Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan was announced as the co-recipient of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education. At age 17, Yousafzai is the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate. She shared the prize with Kailash Satyarthi, a children’s rights activist from India. Read about the Nobel Peace Prize laureates at www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates.

To Demonstrate Understanding

As an assessment, I asked students to work with their groups to write the answer to an essential question, “What is a peacemaker?” This is an essential question because peacemaking is complex: the activities that move a conflict toward a nonviolent resolution may be very different from one historical era to the next, or in one society as compared with another. Are students able to generalize, to find commonalities between the lives and actions of these different historical figures?

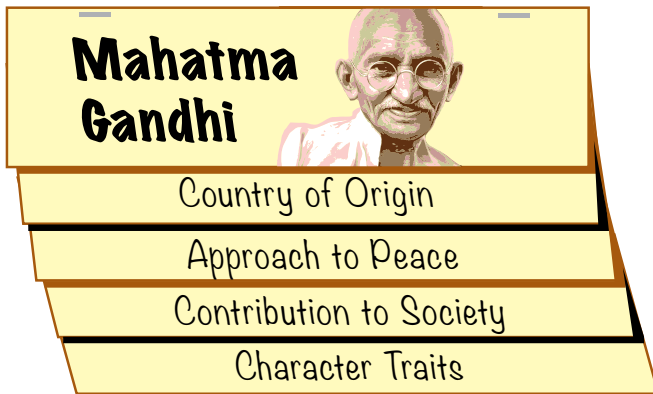
Groups developed operational definitions (descriptions in their own words) and shared their results with the class. The various definitions were usually quite deep, packed with newly learned concepts, and demonstrated full understanding of the concept. For example,

A peacemaker is a persistent, caring person who promotes peace through his or her work with people, animals, or the environment.

Teachers who prefer an individual grading system for each student’s participation (or who wish to measure accomplishment of objectives throughout the lesson) may prefer a rubric, taking notes on whether a student helps gather data; contributes to the matrix; participates in discussions; and helps answer questions. Another option is to have students create individual “foldables” to answer the essential question, “What is a Peacemaker?” as

well as guiding questions, such as

- What are different approaches that people might take in working for peace?
- What are some ways that people can contribute to forming a peaceful society?
- Who are peacemakers in our neighborhood? Our nation? Our world today?



A predictable pitfall I encountered was the “classroom artists” not being contented with drawing a stick figure graphic organizer. This child want to spend more time on creative aspects of the drawing—clothes, shoes, and hair, etc. To address this issue, you may want to use a timer for the graphic organizer activity, walk around, and, at intervals, remind groups about the deadline.

Lesson Extensions (Linked with Standards)

A Classroom Tribute. Students may want to use their operational definitions of “peacemaker” to create a class book, bulletin board, or mural at a later date. Can they find current examples of peacemakers in newspapers and magazines to add to their book or mural? Can they take snapshots of peers, family members, or neighbors who have acted as peacemakers in their lives? (🕒 **PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS**)

Current Events. Relate the lesson to students’ real lives as participatory citizens. Use selected current events to discuss community or world problems. Ask each group to deliberate on one problem retrieved from new articles about current events. Students should think about the previously studied five approaches to peace and decide if one of these specific approaches would be a good fit for addressing the problem. Then, groups create a more detailed possible plan for a peaceful resolution to the problem. (🕒 **CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES**)

Cultural Roots. After learning about the peacemakers’ lives, students may choose to study one of the many countries of origin listed on the wall matrix (e.g., Kenya, Tibet, India,

Vietnam, Canada, Egypt, Brazil, Sweden). For example, how did Gandhi’s growing up in a Hindu family influence his thinking about nonviolence? This research provides students with a geographical and cultural worldview that interconnects themes and helps students compare and contrast diverse peoples and environments. (🕒 **CULTURE; 🕒 **PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; 🕒 **GLOBAL CONNECTIONS******)

Character Traits of Individuals, of Groups. Return to the list of peacemakers’ character traits written on the wall mural. Students reflect on their own personal character traits and write these down, or perhaps, work in small groups to list the traits that the group possesses on account of its members. Ask, “Which of your character traits would be most helpful if you were working for peace?”

At the conclusion of the book, *Great Peacemakers*, Beller and Chase offer complementary questions for readers, one of which asks, “If you were profiled in this book, what would be your chapter subtitle?” For example, the chapter covering Mother Teresa is titled “Love in Action.” Explain that a person does not have to be famous to practice or work for peace. Reflect on Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, “Everybody can be great because everybody can serve,” or Jane Goodall’s statement, “We have a chance to use the gift of our lives to make the world a better place.” There are many organizations around the world that are dedicated to peaceful work and conflict resolution, and each person has traits or talents she or he can contribute to group efforts. To validate this point, show students websites or photos provided by organizations that work for peace (e.g., Children’s Peace Center, Nobel Peace Center, Peace Corps, Seeds of Peace, and Kids for Peace). (🕒 **INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; 🕒 **CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES****)

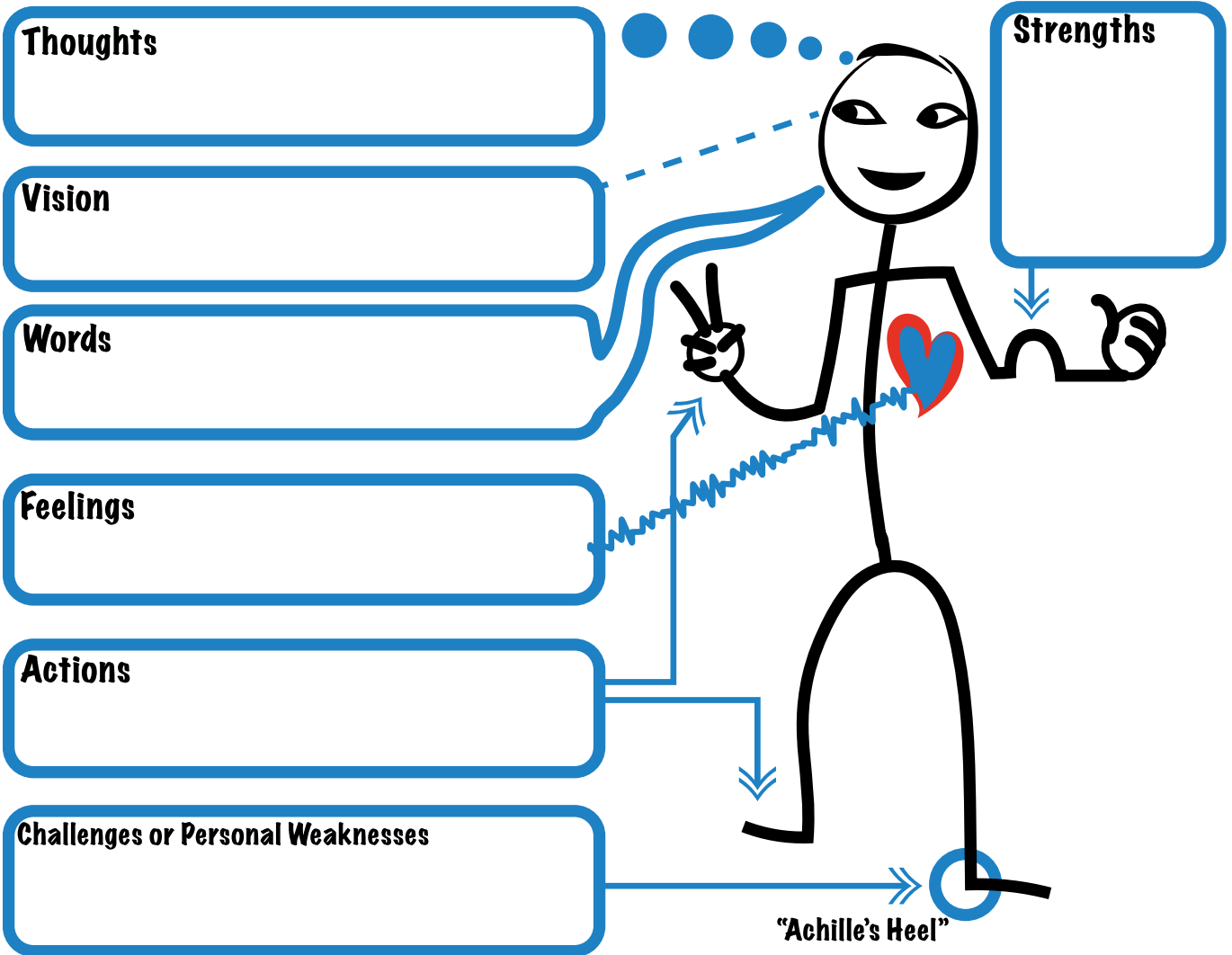
Peacemaking Professions. There are many professions where peacemaking is a central task (e.g., negotiator, mediator, and counselor). It could be argued that peacemaking is a part of every profession, since conflicts can arise with colleagues and customers in any field of endeavor. The term “peacekeeper” is sometimes used to refer to law enforcement officers (police), whose proper training involves using nonviolent methods (such as conversation and negotiation) before resorting to coercive, physical restraint.

What does the concept of “peace” mean to us? Is it simply the absence of violence? Or can it mean taking action by confronting injustices and misunderstandings that might lead to violence? Involving students in creating definitions of “peacemaking” and “peacekeeping” helps them begin to see how such concepts might be understood and widely applied. Can students list six or seven professions (e.g., firefighter, teacher, doctor, news reporter, soldier, police officer, congressperson) and imagine how nonviolent conflict resolution might be part of each? (🕒 **INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; 🕒 **POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; 🕒 **CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES****) 🌍**

Anatomy of a Peacemaker (Graphic Organizer)

Peacemaker's name: _____

Your name: _____



Background about this Peacemaker:

Source: _____

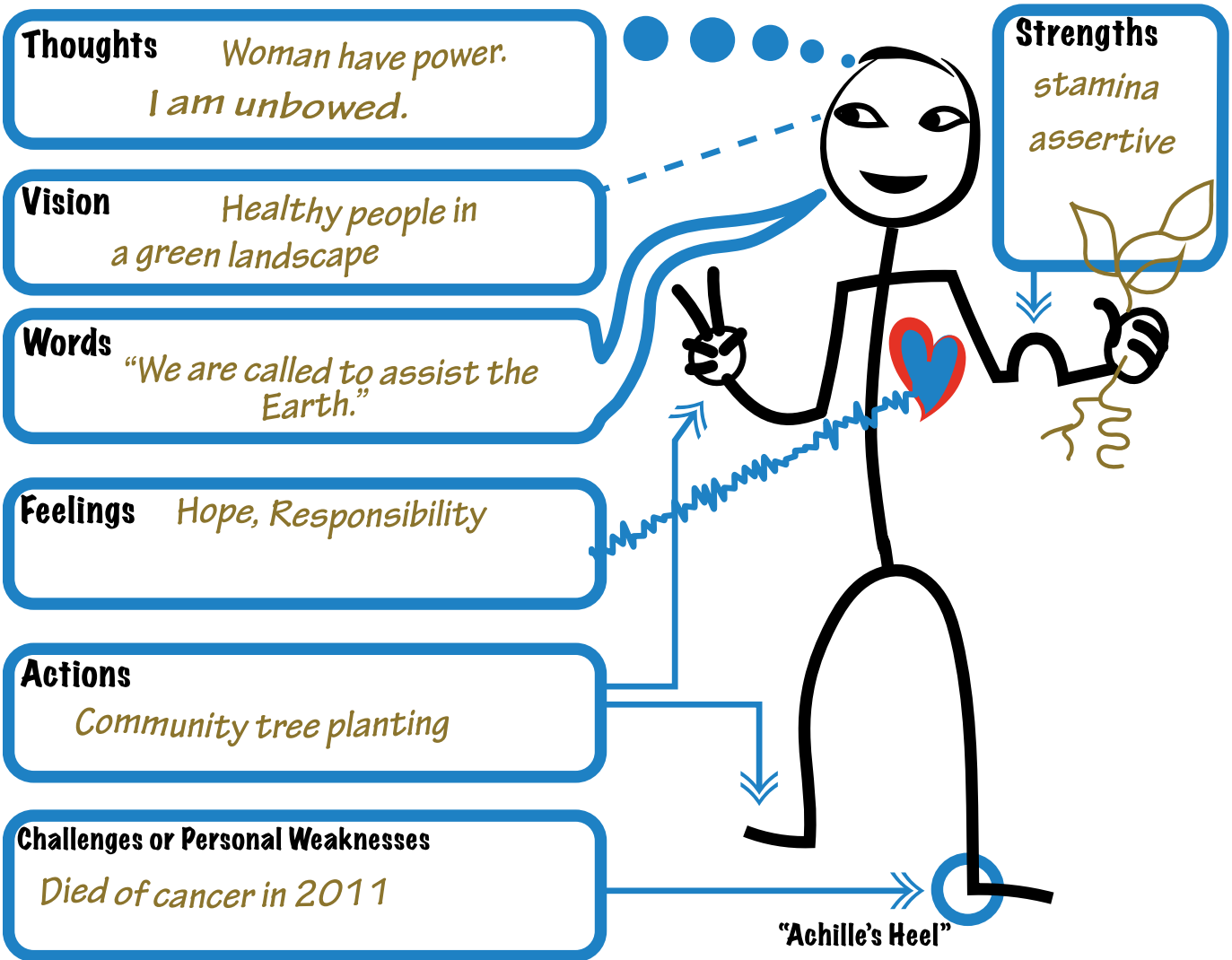
Anatomy of a Peacemaker (Graphic Organizer)

Peacemaker's
name:

Wangari Maathai

Your name:

Sammie



Thoughts *Woman have power.
I am unbowed.*

Vision *Healthy people in
a green landscape*

Words *"We are called to assist the
Earth."*

Feelings *Hope, Responsibility*

Actions
Community tree planting

Challenges or Personal Weaknesses
Died of cancer in 2011

Strengths
*stamina
assertive*

"Achille's Heel"

Background about this Peacemaker:

*She was a professor of anatomy
Nobel Peace Prize winner*

Kenyan Official

Source: *Great Peacemakers*

Suggested Books for Children

Durell, Ann, Marilyn Sachs, Lloyd Alexander, and Jon Agee. *The Big Book for Peace* (New York: E.P. Dutton Children's Books, 1990).

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. *Peaceful Pieces: Poems and Quilts about Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011).

Payne, Lauren Murphy, and Claudia Rohling. *A Leader's Guide to We Can Get Along: A Child's Book of Choices* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit., 1997).

Takayuki, Ishii. *One Thousand Paper Cranes: The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue* (New York: Dell Laurel Leaf, 1997).

Tutu, Desmond and D. A. Abrams, *Desmond and the Very Mean Word* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2013).

Winter, Jeannette. *Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2008).

Zalben, Jane Breskin. *Paths to Peace: People Who Changed the World* (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2006).

Notes

1. Dennis N. Banks. "What Is the State of Human Rights Education in K-12 Schools in the United States in 2000? A Preliminary Look at the National Survey of Human Rights Education" (paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, April 2001), files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED454134.pdf
2. NCSS, *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010).
3. NCSS, The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) *Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013).
4. The following specific Dimension indicators (see note 3) are central to this lesson: D1.2.3-5. Identify disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question that is open to different interpretations; D2.Civ.10.3-5. Identify the beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and values that underlie their own and others' views about civic issues; D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on peoples' responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate; D2.Civ.14.3-5. Illustrate historical and contemporary means of changing society; D2.His.3.3-5. Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped significant historical changes and continuities; D4.2.3-5. Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data.
5. Ken Beller and Heather Chase. *Great Peacemakers: True Stories from Around the World* (Sedona, AZ: LTS Press, 2008).
6. Sam Wineburg mentions "acts of state that commemorate certain events and not others" in the chapter "Making Historical Sense," in *Knowing, Teaching & Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter N. Sterns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 321-2.
7. "All Nobel Peace Prizes," www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates; Efleda P. Tolentino, Jean O'Neill Uhl, Iftikhar Ahmad, "The Nobel Peace Prize: Malala, A Girl Determined to Go to School," *Social Education* 79, no. 1 (January/February 2015).

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A Call for Applications: SSYL Editor

As the end of their five-year term as co-editors of *Social Studies and the Young Learner* draws closer, Co-Editors Andrea Libresco and Jeannette Balantic announce their intention to hand over the editorship in May 2016.

The Editor is a volunteer who is willing to assume a significant leadership position among elementary educators. The editor plans issues, solicits articles, organizes the manuscript review process, and cooperates with NCSS publications staff to produce a high-quality journal. The duration of this unpaid, professional service position is five years. The new editor would join the notable professionals who have served as SSYL editors:

Huber M. Walsh, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Gloria T. Alter, Beloit College
Sherry L. Field, University of Texas-Austin
Linda Bennett, University of Missouri-Columbia
Andrea Libresco, Hofstra University, and
Jeannette Balantic, Garden City Public Schools (NY)

NCSS invites applications from NCSS members interested in this vital leadership role for elementary teachers. The responsibilities of the position include:

- Identifying ways in which the journal can meet the professional needs of classroom teachers as they educate

their students in social studies subjects;

- Organizing theme issues, soliciting manuscripts and administering the review of solicited and unsolicited manuscripts;
- Maintaining communications with authors and reviewers; and
- Coordinating with NCSS editorial staff to produce an interesting, readable, and lively journal that appears on schedule.

NCSS invites applications from members who have the vision to identify the professional needs of elementary teachers of social studies, and are experienced in writing and editing materials that are teacher-friendly and reader-friendly. Applications from two persons wishing to be co-editors (e.g., a university professor and a classroom teacher) are also welcome.

If you are interested in the position, please submit a letter, a resume, and a statement describing your view of the main current professional needs of elementary teachers of social studies and how you, as editor of the journal, would meet these needs. Please also include one or two samples of your most teacher-friendly and reader-friendly writing. Please indicate to what extent you would have institutional support. Send these to Steve Lapham, senior editor, SSYL, via e-mail at slapham@ncss.org. **Deadline April 15, 2015.** Please place "SSYL Editor Position" on the subject line.