

The Art of Peace

Teacher's Guide

by Mark Binder

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If you have any questions, comments or suggestions

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Note: Because of the nature of storytelling, the program occasionally differs from the guide. I apologize in advance for any confusion.

The Art of Peace

As a student and teacher of Aikido (pronounce Eye-key-doh) I have grappled for years with the oxymoron that it is called "The Art of Peace." The founder of Aikido called it a "force to heal the world." How is it possible to on the one hand learn how to blend and diffuse an attacker's energy, and on the other throw that attacker across the room?

I don't have a simple answer, certainly not one that can fit conveniently into a teacher's guide, but engaging in the question produced this program.

Questions for Teachers and Students:

What does Peace mean? How do you know peace? Is it possible to create Peace?

Perceiving Peace

In the story of Terry Dobson on the subway, Dobson prepares for battle, but sees how an old man resolves the conflict without violence.

How does the perception of conflict affect the conflict? How do preconceptions influence events that follow? What can we do to shift from our positional mind to an open and fluid mind?

(Note: This section is usually not included in the elementary school program)

Peace of Mind

One of the more difficult practices for any person is to develop peace of mind.

There are so many distractions and upsets in our world. Set aside the larger global and political scene and think about parents, teachers, brothers and sisters -- and all the annoying things that they do. Sometimes we get angry. Sometimes we suppress our anger. Neither of these actions produce peace of mind.

Questions for Teachers and Students

In the story **The Two Monks and the Gross Slimy Monster**, one of the monks loses his composure. How does he regain it? What lessons does he learn? Is this

something you could do by yourself? How do you develop peace of mind? Can you tell a story about a time you were upset, and still managed to create calm and peace?

Peace in Conflict

It's easy to be at peace when no one is attacking you. But what do you do when a conflict arises? In Aikido, we learn that conflict is not necessarily bad -- what matters is how you treat it, and how you respond in the face of it. We all like to think that we're the good guys, and that they're the bad guys, but really we're just two groups of people who are temporarily in opposition....

The story of **The Bully and the Shrimp** is my most directly Aikido-based story. In the story, Adam's Uncle Maurice (The Mighty Midget) gives him the following advice: "Get out of the way. Relax. Have a secret weapon. Show compassion."

Questions for Teachers and Students

What do you think of Uncle Maurice's advice? How well did Adam follow it? What other alternatives could he have chosen?

What kinds of "secret weapons" can you think of that don't involve violence? How does the idea of showing compassion for your enemy make you feel? Is it something you could do?

Tell a story about a time you showed compassion to someone who was opposing you.

The Power of Peace

Some of the most powerful changes in recent history have been the result of non-violence — Ghandi's victory against the British in India, Nelson Mandela's triumph against apartheid in South Africa, and of course **Rosa Parks's** quiet protest that unlocked the Civil Rights movement in the United States. When people have nothing else but their bodies, minds, hearts and commitments, these alone have proved to be effective forces for social and political change.

And yet, this kind of protest -- nonviolence, the soft spoken "No, I will not give up my seat on the bus" -- is terribly dangerous. The individual protester is vulnerable and unarmed. And this is the secret of that power. Violence almost certainly arises in situations where the people in charge don't want to change.

Questions for Teachers and Students

Can non-violent protest succeed in a society without a free press? What are the dangers of non-violent protest? How does a non-violent protester differ from a soldier in a cause? What would you be willing to protest, to change? Would you be willing to give up your life for those changes?

Peace through Negotiation

Conflict arises whenever one person had a different plan than someone else. It may resolve quite quickly, (by agreement or collaboration) but often people just don't agree. In these situations, the person who is bigger or stronger or has more authority may resort to threats or consequences. Negotiation is an age-old method of resolving conflicts. In the best situations, a win-win result is achieved. In **The Little Boy Who Hated Pizza** a situation is created, and ultimately resolved.

Questions for Teachers and Students

What does it take to negotiate? What would have happened if the father had refused to listen to the son, or the son had refused to budge from his position? Do you think the father really would have refused his son dessert for seven years? Did the boy believe it? What other solutions could you envision?

Choosing Peace

Peace is a choice. It is something that must be created -- or discarded. War is also a choice. Both peace and war create different futures, they have different impacts on the lives of the people who wage them. They leave different trails through the cities and towns.

The Olive Orchard tells the story of an old woman, the last in her family, who watches impassively and impotently as her olive orchard is razed to the ground by soldiers. At the end of the story, she chooses to create a new olive orchard even though she will never live to see it.

Questions for Teachers and Students

What else could she have done? Why do you think the soldiers were cutting down the trees? Did they feel justified? How does the old woman change the young soldier's mind?

Peace through Laughter and Song

Stories are universal. They break through barriers. Most conflict is the result of the distinction between "us" and "them." This is an especially dangerous distinction in a world that seems more and more global. In stories like **Abu Ali and the Donkeys** and **Abu Hassan**, we are able to understand the "other." We learn that "they" laugh at the same stories "we" laugh at. If everyone has the same sense of humor, how can they be enemies?

In **Chiri Bim**, Rabbi Kibbitz is fed up with a never-ending feud between two families. He invites them to lunch, and solves the problem with a song.

If only it were so easy in every day situations. John Lennon sang it in one of the simplest chants he wrote,

"All we are saying is give peace a chance."

Peace isn't an easy path -- not on a personal level, not on a social level, and certainly not when you are faced with the threat of violence to you and your family.

Questions for Teachers and Students

What innovative ways can you invent to bring peace?

What actions can you take to bring peace?

How can you bring peace in your own family?

Biography

Mark Binder is a writer and an award-winning professional storyteller. He is the author of "The Brothers Schlemiel," "The Everything Bedtime Story Book," and more than 100 other published stories. He holds a third degree black belt in Aikido, the Martial Art for Peace. He tells stories, runs creativity workshops, and lectures throughout New England. Visit his web site at <http://www.markbinder.com>

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