

A Curriculum Guide to

***Grandfather Gandhi***

by Arun Gandhi and Bethany Hegedus

illustrated by Evan Turk

**Summary**

Arun Gandhi, the grandson of the famous Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, wonders if he can live up to his grandfather’s example of peaceful, nonviolent existence—“everyone working as one.” While staying at Grandfather’s service village—a place where 350 followers live and work together as one family—Arun learns to deal with his anger over being shoved by an older boy, teased by other children, and evaluated by his tutor who thinks he has a great deal to learn.

Grandfather lovingly teaches Arun that instead of lashing out against others, he can transform his anger by making lasting changes that benefit everyone, not just himself. As Arun tells us, deciding to accept peace over violence was a life-changing decision reaching far beyond his childhood experience.

**Background Material for Teachers and Librarians**

Before, during, and after reading the book, you can offer students additional background information that will provide a foundation for understanding the book. The following sources help explain Gandhi’s life and mission:

- Read a biography of Mahatma Gandhi at <http://history1900s.about.com/od/people/a/gandhi.htm>
- Find and share selected Mahatma Gandhi quotes at [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/mahatma\\_gandhi.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/mahatma_gandhi.html)
- Watch videos of Mahatma Gandhi at <http://www.biography.com/people/mahatma-gandhi-9305898>
- Google photographs of Mahatma Gandhi

**Discussion Questions/Activities**

**Main Idea and Key Details**

The Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to identify the main idea of a text and explain the key details that support it (RI.1-5.2), ask and answer questions about key ideas in a text (RI.1-3.1), and describe the connection between two events (RI.1.3). The activities below incorporate these skills by focusing attention on key ideas and supporting evidence.

1. What valuable lesson about dealing with anger did Arun Gandhi learn from his grandfather?
2. **Decision Tree:** Arun has to decide what to do about his anger. He could strike back, hitting the boy who shoved him; he could walk away and do nothing; or he could use his anger to make changes that would help everyone. One example of how to turn anger to electricity is how Arun used this lesson to inform his life's work. He had the potential to turn into a person made angry by the injustices and prejudices he faced, but instead he used it as motivation to spread his grandfather's message, and that is now his life's work.

Use a decision tree to help students think about Arun's alternatives. Work with students to complete a decision tree that shows (1) the need for a decision, (2) the possible decisions Arun could make, and (3) the effects of each decision. Ask students to decide which decision is best and why.

Here's what a finished diagram might look like:

### Need for a Decision: Arun has to decide what to do about his anger.

#### Possible Decisions:

#### Possible Effects of Each Decision

Decision # 1: Arun decides to throw a rock at Suman.

- Suman will be hurt and everyone's anger will increase.
- Arun will not learn how to control his anger.

Decision #2: Arun decides to use his anger to make life better for everyone.

- Arun will help himself and others.
- Arun will follow Grandpa's example.

Decision #3: Arun decides to remain angry, but do nothing.

- Arun's anger will increase and possibly lead to violence.
- Arun will lose the opportunity to use his anger to help himself and others.

Note to Teachers: If possible, show the different decisions as branches in a tree, with the “Need for a Decision” at the bottom. Also, consider filling in the tree to include the “Need for a Decision” and perhaps, one of the decisions.

3. Arun tells us that idleness [not working or being lazy] is not allowed in the “service village” where Grandfather lives. What did Arun and others do to keep themselves busy? How are these activities similar to how your family spends time? How are the activities different?
4. **Talk Show:** Imagine you could invite the people from the book to be guests on a talk show. Here are the people to invite:
  - Arun [pronounced: UH-rune]
  - Grandfather
  - Suman (the boy who shoved Arun) [pronounced: Soo-mun]
  - Kanu (Arun’s cousin) [pronounced: kuh-noo]
  - Bhanasali kaka (Arun’s tutor) [pronounced: bhun-saa-li kaka]

To prepare for the show, first make a list of questions to ask. Then have several people pretend to be the invited guests and another person act as the master of ceremonies or MC. When you start the show, have the MC take questions from the audience. The characters should answer using evidence from the book.

Here are some topics to ask about:

- Putting anger to work for you in order to change things for the better
- Living in a “service village”
- Doing chores
- The rule that “idleness is not allowed”
- How Grandfather taught peace by telling stories, not by telling Arun he was foolish or wrong

Use these words to begin your questions:

- *Who . . . ?*
- *What . . . ?*
- *When . . . ?*
- *Where . . . ?*
- *Why . . . ?*
- *How . . . ?*
- *What if . . . ?*
- *What could have happened when . . . ?*
- *What is important to know about . . . ?*

Here are two sample questions to get you started:

- A question for Arun: How did living in Grandfather’s service village change your life?

- A question for Grandfather: What do you hope Arun learns as he grows up?

### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author’s point of view. The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

5. **Vocabulary in Context**: Several words introduced in the book are not defined, but students should be able to figure them by using the context and the illustrations. As a group, have students discuss the meaning of each word in bold print. Which words and phrases are useful in figuring out the word? How do the illustrations help?

- “**Bapuji** sat serenely on the floor. I hung back, afraid to be in his presence, but Ela took my hand and we rushed to him.”

**Bapuji** (BAA-poo-jee): Indian term of address. Bapu means father. The “ji” is added to mark honor and may mean Grandfather or a term of respect for an older gentleman.

- “Grandfather listened, and when I finished, he wiped his spectacles on his **dhoti**, put them back on, and looked me in the eye.”

**Dhoti**: A traditional men’s garment worn in India.

- “After lessons, with the sun high overhead, I was glad to head to the soccer field. I wanted to forget about the **ashram** rules, forget about being a Gandhi.”

**Ashram**: In Gandhi’s terms, a community where individuals and/or families come together to live and work as one family. All chores are done collectively in the spirit of embracing others, even newcomers and strangers, as a family member.

- “Grandfather didn’t need to say it. I’d never live up to the **Mahatma**. I’d never be at peace.”

**Mahatma** (Muh-haat-ma): A person who is respected for high-mindedness, wisdom, and selflessness.

- “Someone, maybe even Grandfather must have told him [my tutor] that I didn’t speak **Gujarati** well.”

**Gujarati**: A language spoken in western India.

6. **Find What Doesn't Belong:** For each group of words and phrases below, select the one word that doesn't belong and cross it out. Then give the remaining words a title that fits all the words. For example, in the first group below the word *anger* does not fit. All the other words describe life in Grandfather Gandhi's village.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
350 followers  
chores  
anger  
morning prayer

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
angry  
ashamed  
content  
disappointed

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
transform  
channel  
keep  
change

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
criticize  
respect  
admire  
value

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
idle  
working  
lazy  
resting

Challenge students to make additional examples of word groups like these.

7. **Examining Nonfiction Text Features:** Examine the nonfiction text features in the book. Make a chart showing each text feature and what that feature tells the reader. A sample chart might look like this:

Text Feature	What Information It Provides
Front Cover	Title, author, illustrator

Back Cover	Illustration related to the content of the book. Shows people in Grandfather Gandhi's village doing chores.
Title Page	Title, author, illustrator, publisher
Endpapers	Pictures that give clues about what the book is about. The endpapers in the book show spinning wheels. Spinning was an important activity for Grandfather Gandhi.
Copyright Page	Lists the unusual materials (such as handspun cotton) used to illustrate the book.
Opening Letter and Illustration	Provides background information about when the events in the book happened and who was involved. Illustration shows spinning, which was important to Grandfather Gandhi.
Overall Chronological Structure	The book is written in chronological order, beginning with Arun's arrival at Grandfather's village for a two-year visit.
Authors' Note	The authors explain how they met and why they decided to write the book.

8. **The Authors' Point of View:** Reread the last two pages of the book. What do you think the authors want you to know about Arun's experience?

### Integration of Information

The Common Core State Standards ask students to use both the illustrations and details to describe key ideas and to show how images contribute to and clarify a text (RI.1-4.7).

9. **Words and Illustrations That Focus on the Importance of Work:** In several places in the book, both the words and the illustrations show the importance of work as a way to hold a community together and achieve self-sufficiency. You can see this from the beginning on the two-page spread showing the letter from Grandpa to Arun. In the letter Grandpa emphasizes that Arun will learn a lot by spinning. The illustration covering both pages shows a hand holding cotton and a spinning wheel or *charkha*.

Discuss how the words and illustration work together on this two-page spread:

- What information is only given in the written text?
  - What information is only given in the illustration?
  - How do the written text and the illustration work together?
10. Find other two-page spreads that deal with the importance of work in holding the community together. Study each spread and share your findings:
- What information is only given in the written text?
  - What information is only given in the illustration?
  - How do the written text and the illustration work together?

Here are some suggested two-page spreads to use:

- Spread showing different members of the village working. The written text begins with “I was glad that when the sky turned the deep orange of a tangerine, it was a time for chores.”
- Spread showing Grandfather and Arun discussing anger. The final sentence on this two-page spread says, “‘Let us spin,’ he said, and he sat before one of two spindles.”
- Spread showing the people in the community bound together by the spindle and thread. The last sentence on this spread is “Arun, we can all work to use our anger, instead of letting it use us.”

Contrast these spreads with the two-page spread showing Arun’s angry feelings when he is shoved on the soccer field. The written text describes how he wants to throw a rock and hit Suman. The illustration shows Arun *tangled* in thread with a furious expression on his face. He is holding a rock. There is no spinning wheel. Arun seems to be turning into a monster who cannot work with others.

11. The illustrator Evan Turk uses painting, collage and even handspun cotton in his artwork. Discuss his art style. What does this 3-D art style provide to the book? Why do you think he chose to work with the materials that he does, especially the handspun cotton?

Students can even create their own artwork using this technique (painting + collage, using materials relevant to the story), if they feel inspired.

### Writing

The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing to express an opinion (**W.1.1, 2, 3**), writing to inform or explain (**W.1-3.2**), and writing to recount sequenced events (**W.1-3.3**). The writing activities below reflect these standards.

11. The authors suggest that we should channel our feelings of anger into positive actions that help everyone. Explain why you agree or disagree with them.
12. Give your opinion. What is the best thing to do when you get angry?
13. Explain how Arun changed from being an angry boy to being a person who chose peace and positive action.

Draw an illustration like the one on the back cover to go with your explanation. Use a circle divided into four parts. Number the parts 1 - 4. In parts 1 and 2, show Arun dealing with his anger. In parts 3 and 4, show Arun learning to choose peace and positive action.

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