Gandhi was born in an India when it was under the colonial rule of the British Empire; the British Empire controlled its colonies through legal, economic, and political methods. The British first came to India as traders. Gradually they took over most of the country, controlling not only the hugely profitable trade in tea, spices, textiles, and other important products, but also establishing a political system of British courts and governmental institutions. Gandhi was born in 1869, when the British Queen Victoria was at the height of her reign over the world’s largest and richest empire. Even as a boy, Gandhi was interested in religion and tried hard to follow local religious customs of diet and behavior. Sent to London to study law in 1888, Gandhi developed a deep respect for the British legal system; he did not know that he would spend much of his life fighting against the rule of Great Britain.

The British Empire was immensely powerful and rich and the colonies had complex economic and social relationships with the ‘mother’ country. It was common for middle-class and upper class Indian boys to be educated in English. At the same time, they faced racial discrimination when they went to England or other parts of the Empire.

In 1893, he was offered a chance to work as a lawyer for an Indian firm in South Africa. While working in South Africa, he had an experience that would change the course of his life, and the course of history.

Use the video to answer the below questions:
A) Describe the events that occurred on a train in South Africa.

B) Why was Gandhi surprised at the way he was treated?

The Massacre at Amritsar

In 1915, Gandhi returned from South Africa to live in India. In March of 1919 (right around the time Gandhi began to gain popularity in India), the British had passed a new law known as the “Rowlatt Act”. The Rowlatt Act was a set of new laws that allowed the British to throw any Indian they suspected of terrorism in jail for a period of two years without a trial. On April 6th 1919, a group of Indians gathered to protest these new laws. The British crushed the protest with brute force in an event that became known as the Amritsar Massacre (also called the Jallianwala Bagh massacre by the Indian people).

Use the video to answer the below questions:
A) Describe the actions of the British soldiers.

B) Why would this event lead to more support for the Indian Independence movement?

Gandhi’s Beliefs

Gandhi’s ideas about how people should live were based on his religion, Hinduism. Hindus do not eat beef and generally believe that it is wrong to kill animals for any purpose. However, Gandhi lived more strictly than most people, even religious people, in India. He owned very few material possessions, and he tried to follow a vegetarian diet of simple food. He tried to do everything in his life with careful spiritual consideration and thought. As he wrote once, “Non-violence ... must begin at home.”
Civil Resistance

Although his principles were nonviolent, his goal was active social and legal change. Gandhi always looked for ways in which he could actively resist unjust laws, and government policies. As he once wrote, "non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good." Even when violently attacked by policemen with deadly weapons, Gandhi and his followers peacefully continued violating what they saw as unfair laws, like burning immigrant registration cards, burning imported textiles, marching to the sea to gather local salt, and supporting striking workers. Most importantly, they did not try to fight back. This approach created by Gandhi is called “civil resistance” (It is also sometimes called “civil disobedience” or passive resistance).

“The function of a civil resister is to provoke response. And we will continue to provoke—until they respond or they change the law. They are not in control—we are. That is the secret of civil resistance.”

PARTNER SCENARIO:

School officials decide that starting September 2011, all students who fail a class must wear large red signs around their neck that shows everyone they failed a class. Even though you didn’t fail a class, you agree that this new rule is embarrassing, insulting, and unfair to students.

How could you use Gandhi’s ideas of civil resistance to protest this new school rule?

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In the following clip, Indian civil resisters were protesting against the British because their leader Gandhi was thrown in prison.

Use the video to answer the below questions:

A) Describe how the Indians resisted the British.

____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

B) Was this example of Indian civil resistance effective? Explain.

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The Independence Movement

Gandhi used his technique of civil resistance to protest British rule of India. In 1929 Gandhi was arrested for burning British-made textiles. He accused the British of stealing Indian cloth-making techniques and then moving jobs out of India to factories in Britain. He called for a boycott of British goods, especially textiles, and urged Indians to wear only cotton from India, woven in India. He worked to restore pride in India’s traditional spinning and weaving industries, making the spinning wheel a symbol of the nationalist movement. Women joined the self-sufficiency movement in large numbers, learning to spin and weave their own clothes and producing as much as they could in their own homes.

The Salt March

In 1930, he led hundreds of followers on a 240 mile march to the sea to make salt from salt water in order to protest the Salt Law, a law that said Indians were not allowed to make their own salt; they had to buy imported salt from the British who put a heavy tax on the product. With tens of thousands of his followers, Gandhi walked to the sea and demonstrated how to make salt on the beach. This famous act is known as the Salt March.

Use the video to answer the below questions:

A) Did the British expect the Salt March to be a success?

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B) Was the Salt March a success? Explain.

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