

## Writing about a Peacemaker

by JIMALEE SOWELL AND BISHWA RAJ GAUTAM

Boulding (2000) has pointed out that “Conflict is ubiquitous.” In today’s world, unfortunately, conflict does seem to be everywhere, which means that now perhaps more than ever, education needs to play a critical role in helping students develop the skills of conflict resolution, respect for difference and diversity, and compassion for others. As language instructors, we are in a privileged position from which to create scenarios and activities that provide students with opportunities to practice these skills. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, many English language teaching methods have emphasized the development of oral language proficiency (Howatt and Widdowson 2004; Richards 2015), and in current teaching practice, writing skills are often overlooked.

However, second-language learners increasingly need effective writing skills in English for academic and professional purposes (Richards 2015), as well as for personal and social purposes. To date, peace education (PE) activities in the English language classroom have mostly focused on speaking. This article presents an activity that can help fill the gap in the lack of resources on writing activities for PE in the English language classroom. Using PE as a framework, students read and write about a peacemaker to reflect on the meaning of peace and how it can be achieved.

### WHAT IS PEACE EDUCATION?

PE, also sometimes called peace learning, is both a philosophy and a process. It focuses on the teaching and learning of skills for resolving conflict nonviolently and creating a sustainable environment, with the aim of building a better world for everyone (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos 2016; Harris 2008; Harris and Morrison 2013; Oxford 2013). PE focuses on developing skills such as listening, reflection, cooperation, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and in many contexts it focuses on human rights (Harris 2008). PE aims to create models of learning through curricula, pedagogy, dialogue-based interactions, and analysis of multiple perspectives of historical narratives (Bajaj 2014; Bekerman and Zembylas 2012; Hantzopoulos 2010, 2011; Reardon 2000).

PE activities can be carried out in any setting, either formally in institutions of learning or informally through community-based PE initiatives, with participants of various ages, from preschool to beyond higher education (Harris and Morrison 2013). There is no one single blueprint for a PE curriculum, as each context and each group of learners are necessarily unique (Bajaj 2008), and the tools and techniques of PE will reflect each context. Two of the major components

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of PE focus on (a) reflecting on definitions of peace and (b) learning about the lives and work of peacemakers (Oxford 2013). These two components shape the focus of this activity.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students will research and consider definitions of peace.
- Students will become aware of some important human-rights activists and peacemakers.
- Students will reflect on ways in which activists have worked for peace.
- Students will develop a short piece of writing about a peacemaker.

- Students will design and display a poster.
- Students will apply critical thinking in balancing visual and written information in creating content for display or distribution.

## PART ONE: REFLECTING ON PEACE AND PEACE ACTIVISM

### Activity 1: Warm-up

In pairs or small groups, have students brainstorm their ideas associated with the words *peace* and *peacemaker*. After a few minutes, elicit students' ideas and write them on the board or post them in a central location (such as a shared Google Docs file) if teaching online. This should lead to a whole-class or small-group discussion

Questions	Notes
What actions did the peacemaker in your text take in order to achieve peace?	
What three to five challenges or difficulties did the peacemaker face in working toward achieving peace?	
What did this peacemaker teach the world about peace?	
What long-lasting impact has this peacemaker had on others?	
My question(s):	
Other important notes:	

Figure 1. Chart to guide students' note-taking about a peacemaker

about the meaning of peace and the role of a peacemaker; you can expect that there will be many ideas.

You can use the following questions to prompt the discussion:

- What is peace?
- How do people achieve peace?
- Can you give examples of how someone has acted for peace, change, or human rights?

**Activity 2: Reading about a peacemaker**

Students will read about peacemakers. You might choose to focus on peacemakers within

your local context or in the global context. If your class is small, each student can be assigned a different peacemaker. If you have a large class, some students might be assigned the same peacemaker. The book *Great Peacemakers: True Stories from Around the World* by Ken Beller and Heather Chase (2008) is an excellent resource for texts on peacemakers. If you do not have access to this book, however, you can provide students with a list of peacemakers such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Desmond Tutu, Jane Goodall, Nader Khalili, Rosa Parks, and Mother Teresa. Simple English Wikipedia ([simple.wikipedia.org](http://simple.wikipedia.org)) is an excellent online resource for English language learners; there, they can find useful information about peacemakers and activists that is written in basic English.

## Rosa Parks: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement



Rosa Parks was a civil rights activist. She has been called the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.” Rosa is best known for her actions as a passenger on a bus in 1955. At that time in the United States, black and white passengers were segregated on buses. White people sat in the front, and black people sat in the back. Rosa was tired of being discriminated against. One day, a bus driver asked Rosa to move to the back of the bus and give her seat to a white passenger. Rosa refused to change seats. She was arrested for her refusal. Rosa’s actions led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This boycott caused a change in the law. With the new law, black and white people were no longer required to sit in different sections on buses. Rosa’s refusal was an important action in the movement against racial discrimination. Rosa helped to teach the world that all people should be treated equally.



**Rosa Parks**

**Figure 2. Sample museum poster**

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Encourage students to take notes as they read. You can provide them with a chart to guide their note-taking (see Figure 1).

### **PART TWO: PRODUCING A POSTER**

#### **Step 1: Analyzing a model**

Show your learners a sample display poster. (See Figure 2 for an example.) Using the three components of a rhetorical situation (genre, purpose, and audience), analyze the model with students. (See Figure 3 for a guide.) In addition, ask students how choices about the design of the poster might affect the reader.

Tell students that they are going to make a museum-style poster like the one in

the example, based on their peacemaker. Students should imagine that their poster will be displayed in a museum. They are going to make a physical poster (on poster board) with text and visuals that they will display for their classmates. (Digital posters can be made in PowerPoint and applications such as Canva.)

Let students know that the text they write will be no more than 150 to 200 words, so they will need to focus on highlighting the most important aspects of their peacemaker and the peacemaker's work. You might tell them, "Imagine that you are a visitor to a museum, looking at displays. What would you want to learn about

<b>Rhetorical situation</b>	
<b>1. Genre</b>	What is the genre (type) of this piece of writing?
<b>2. Purpose</b>	What is the purpose of this piece of writing?
<b>3. Audience</b>	Who is the intended audience for this piece of writing?
<b>Design</b>	
<b>Design choices</b> (Think about the layout, font type and size, colors, design, length of the text, picture, and so on.)	How do design choices influence the written message?

**Figure 3. Questions for analyzing the model**

Write your name and one thing you learned about this peacemaker from this poster.

Name	One thing you learned

**Figure 4. Sample grid for comments on peacemakers**

peacemakers? How much would you be able to read? What kind of information would stick with you?”

**Step 2: Drafting**

Ask students to write a draft about their peacemaker. Recommend that they refer to the notes they created while they were reading.

Students can use the following questions to guide their writing:

- Who is your text about?
- What actions did the peacemaker take in order to achieve peace?
- What challenges or difficulties did your peacemaker face in working toward achieving peace? How did your peacemaker overcome them?
- What contribution or contributions has your peacemaker made to the world?
- Has reading this text influenced you? If so, how?

When students have finished their draft, provide them with the feedback they need to revise. At this stage, you could use self-editing, peer feedback, teacher feedback, or all three. Students will do one or more rounds of revision, as needed.

**Step 3: Moving from draft to poster**

When students have completed their final drafts, they will put their text in poster form. If students make the posters by using PowerPoint, or online applications like Canva, make sure they know where and how they can later get their posters printed. In a low-resource context, students can write on poster board and add visuals by drawing or cutting and pasting images from magazines and other materials.

**PART THREE: DISPLAYING THE POSTERS**

**Step 1: Hanging the posters**

Students bring their posters to class and post them on the walls. Next to each poster, put a sheet of paper where other students will be able to write comments. (See Figure 4 for an example of a comment sheet.) If your class is large, you can divide the class into two groups. Students in Group A will post their posters on one side of the room, and Group B students will post their posters on the other side of the room. Students in Group A then go to Group B’s posters, and students in Group B go to Group A’s posters.

In an online context, students can display their digital posters in a Zoom session or post them on a class Facebook page.

**Step 2: Holding a gallery walk**

The purpose of the gallery walk is to give the writer of each poster feedback on what the

readers have learned and to help readers of the posters reflect on what they have learned about different peacemakers. In a face-to-face class, students walk around the classroom as though they were in a museum and read the posters. They must write comments about at least three of their classmates' posters on the sheets provided.

In an online class, students can share their posters in Zoom, and their classmates can write comments in the chat box. Alternatively, students can upload their posters to a class Facebook page, where they could write comments about each other's posters. (This could be done as a homework assignment, outside of class time.)

Note that students' comments should relate to the content on the poster and the information learned; the comments should *not* be an evaluation of the poster.

### Step 3: Publishing the posters

If you have your own classroom or a central location for display at your school, you might ask your students if they would like to have their posters on display. If students have digital copies of their poster, they can upload them to a class website or other Internet location. You (or your students) can take pictures of the posters and upload them to a class website. If you do intend to display your students' work publicly, make sure you have their permission and make sure they understand that there is no penalty if they decide they do not want to display their work in a public venue.

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**Jimalee Sowell** is a PhD candidate in Composition and Applied Linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She has served as an English Language Fellow and an English Language Specialist. Her research interests include disability studies, teaching writing, peace education, genre analysis, large class pedagogy, and teacher education.

**Bishwa Raj Gautam** is the Regional English Language Program Specialist at the U.S. Embassy Kathmandu, Nepal. Mr. Gautam has over 15 years of experience in teacher training, educational program development and implementation, and research and publication in educational issues.