



Name: _____

“Do Small Things in a Great Way”

Compare-Contrast Language, Reporting Information and Summarizing

Preview: About the Author

Colman McCarthy, born March 24, 1938, is an award-winning journalist, author, teacher, speaker and peace activist. He wrote for the *Washington Post* newspaper from 1969-1997, and he is currently the director of the Center for Teaching Peace in Washington, D.C. He has taught at Georgetown University and the University of Maryland, among other schools.

1 Pre-Reading Questions. Discuss the following questions as a class or with a classmate.

1. What does “peace” mean?
2. How can you achieve peace as an individual?
3. How can we achieve peace as a society?

2 Vocabulary Preview. Match the words below with their definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ surface | a. the ability to read and write |
| 2. _____ atheist | b. someone who does not believe in violence as a solution |
| 3. _____ irrelevant | c. to make something less painful |
| 4. _____ cram | d. the outside or upper layer |
| 5. _____ flunk | e. one’s sense of whether one’s actions are right or wrong |
| 6. _____ literacy | f. to force a lot of material into a small space |
| 7. _____ conscience | g. to not appreciate the benefit or value of something |
| 8. _____ awareness | h. the amount of money available for particular purposes |
| 9. _____ reinforce | i. to fail a class or a test |
| 10. _____ take for granted | j. not useful or relating to the topic of discussion |
| 11. _____ alleviate | k. an amount that is not enough or not adequate |
| 12. _____ pacifist | l. lacking knowledge about something |
| 13. _____ deficiency | m. knowledge of oneself or one’s environment |
| 14. _____ ignorance | n. to make something stronger |
| 15. _____ budget | o. someone who does not believe in the existence of God or any higher power |

3 As You Read. While you are reading Colman McCarthy’s essay on pages 2-4, look for and mark (underline or highlight) the author's thesis and major points.

Do Small Things in a Great Way

by Colman McCarthy

Every government claims it seeks peace. Every human heart yearns for it. No calling is higher or more noble than that of the peacemaker, no matter the form it may take. Peace is the result of love. However, if love were easy, we'd all be good at it.

It isn't so easy because creating the conditions for both a heart at peace and a peaceable society demands commitments to three forces: one spiritual, one social and one intellectual. The forces are prayer, service and nonviolence.

By prayer, I don't mean the act of asking God for self-serving benefits or boons: a successful bypass operation, a better job, or a politician who votes my way. True prayer – the prayer of Amos and Isaiah, of such Christian saints as Teresa of Avila and Clare of Assisi, of the Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and B'hai saints, and Chief Little Priest of the Native American Church – reverses it. Nothing is asked from God. Instead, God is asked, what do you want from me?

That's risky. The answer might demand new ways of thinking or acting. If religion has no risks, it's mere religiosity: surface piety, not inner morals. Ties to organized religion are not needed for prayerfulness, as can be observed by the deep spirituality practiced by many atheists and agnostics. Albert Camus, the French novelist, professed atheism, yet he was invited by the Dominicans to speak at their retreats. Prayer is no more than asking "How should I be using my gifts?" and then acting on the answer. One of those answers, surely, is to help others discover their gifts. What is parenthood about, if not that? Or teaching? Which teachers do we remember except those who pushed us to discover our gifts?

The second essential commitment is service. My wife and I have three sons. When they were younger, we would often have friends over for dinner. At some point, someone would notice the kids and, eager to relate, ask the inevitable question: What do you want to be when you grow up?

The question had always bothered me. Don't ask them that, I would say to myself. It's inane and irrelevant. Instead, ask young people the question that truly matters: How do you want to serve society when you are ready? Get it into their minds, hearts, spirits and souls at an early age that we expect service from them, that that's where they'll find their joy and their life's meaning.

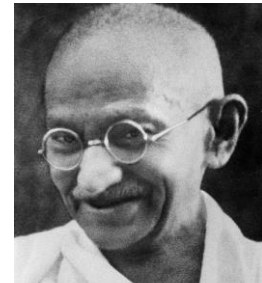
In the high school, college and law school classes I've been teaching for the past 15 years, my students have one challenge: Their minds are crammed with so many academic theories and book-learned thoughts that they leave school idea rich but experience poor. They're unbalanced. I worry about them, especially those who get too many A's. As Walker Percy wrote, you can earn all A's but go out and flunk life. As a way to involve all my brainy students in experiential knowledge, I offer them a service alternative: Go into an elementary school or a high school and teach conflict resolution skills, or tutor in a literacy program.

Ten years ago, I had an English major in my class at the University of Maryland. She had earned all A's and could quote Shakespeare and Milton. I suggested she learn about English from the other end, by teaching an illiterate how to read. She went to a local literacy program and was matched with a truck driver. They spent a semester together. The truck driver learned how to read, and his world expanded. Similarly, my English student's world was broadened: she learned how she wanted to live. Near the end, she came to me and said how much the experience had changed her life.

We professors rarely challenge our students by leading them into the life of service. In many schools and among many teachers, including me, that's changing. More than a fourth of my University of Maryland students last year were literacy tutors to third- and fourth-graders at a District of Columbia elementary school where 90 percent of the children come from fatherless families and where a majority have relatives or close neighbors in prison. Some of the gains are measurable – the reading scores of the tutored kids went up – and some are not: the stirrings of conscience among my college students, the new awareness of their gifts, a shift in thinking so that now the good life means a giving life.

What these students learned outside the classroom reinforces some of the teachings of the peacemakers we study inside. There is Albert Schweitzer, the German theologian and medical missionary in Gabon, West Africa, who wrote in *Reverence for Life*, “No one has the right to take for granted his own advantages over others in health, in talent, in ability, in success, in a happy childhood or congenial home conditions. One must pay a price for all these boons. What one owes in return is a special responsibility for other lives... He who has experienced good in his life must feel the obligation to dedicate some of his own life in order to alleviate suffering.”

The third commitment is to nonviolent conflict resolution. As a lifelong pacifist, I wanted to find out whether peacemaking can be taught. In 1982, I went to an inner-city high school near my office at the Washington Post and asked the principal if I could teach a course called “Solutions to Violence.” Give it a try, she said. I’ve been teaching it ever since. It isn’t a difficult course. We read some Gandhi, King, Merton, Day, Muste, Jesus, Francis, Amos, Isaiah, Tolsoy, Einstein, Buddah, Adin Ballou, Sojourner Truth, Jeannette Rankin, Jane Addams, George Fox, John Woolman, Scott Nearing, Eugene Debs, David Dellinger, Dan and Philip Berrigan, Albert Schweitzer, Thich Nhat Hanh, William Lloyd Garrison, Michael True, Vincent Harding, Mulford Sibley and Howard Zinn. For starters.



Mahatma Gandhi

When I mention those names on the first day of class, someone inevitably raises a hand to ask, “How’d you hear of all those people?” Then I’m asked, “Why haven’t we heard of them?” To the second question: You haven’t heard of them because you go to American schools. In our 3,000 colleges, 28,000 high schools and 78,000 elementary schools, students are graduated as peace illiterates.

Imagine the cry for reform if we suddenly realized that we were a nation of math illiterates. Imagine that our citizens insisted that $2+2=93$ or that $3 \times 3=85$, yet this was a nation of otherwise intelligent people with great achievements in the arts and sciences.

When you inquired about the obvious deficiencies in math, you were told the schools didn’t teach it. A few citizens sought to change that but were dismissed as crazy. So no politicians dared to run for office with a proposal that math be taught in the schools. Teachers who told students that $2+2=4$, not 93, were reported to the school boards as radicals not to be entrusted with impressionable young minds. Newspaper editorials criticized the ignorance and called for committees to study the problem, but none argued that schools should hire math teachers.

That’s about where we are regarding peace education. Few know how to teach it because few were taught. Few can imagine that other answers besides fists, guns, armies, bombs and nukes should be considered as solutions to conflicts, whether the conflicts were within families or workplaces or among governments. The consequence of our peace illiteracy is that the good

life is all but impossible. Instead, the wounded life, the destroyed life, the oppressed life is tolerated.

For example, about 22,000 murders are committed annually in the United States. The leading cause of injury among American women is being beaten by at home by a man. The US Congress gives the Pentagon a military budget of \$700 million a day, an amount three times the Peace Corps' budget for a year.

A life of peace and love is incompatible with violence. But who does not feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem or feel nearly helpless by the smallness of one's personal response? Nevertheless, we must not be stopped by these challenges. After all, we are not called upon to do great things. Rather, we are asked to do small things in a great way. Prayer, service and nonviolence are the small things.

from *Notre Dame Magazine*, Summer 1997

McCarthy, Colman. "Do Small Things in a Great Way." *Strength through Peace: The Ideas and People of Nonviolence*. Ed. Colman McCarthy. Washington, D.C.: Center for Teaching Peace, 2000. 89-93. Print.

Adapted and reprinted with permission of the author.

4 After You Read. Discuss (or think about) Colman McCarthy's answers to Pre-Reading questions 2 and 3.

5 Identifying Main Ideas. Complete the outline below.

Thesis: _____

Main Point 1: Prayer is the first action for achieving peace. _____

Explanation: _____

Key Detail or Example: _____

Main Point 2: _____

Explanation: How one can serve society best is an important question to consider. _____

Key Detail or Example: _____

Key Detail or Example: _____

Main Point 3: _____

Explanation: _____

Key Detail or Example: Students should read authors such as Gandhi, King, and others. _____

Key Detail or Example: _____

6 Language Focus: Compare-Contrast Language. Review the Compare-Contrast section of the [Word Combination Card](#). Then match the phrases below. Finally, write the complete sentences and add punctuation and capital letters as needed. The first one has been done as an example.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Peace is the result of love <u> b </u> | a. yet this was a nation of otherwise intelligent people with great achievements in the arts and sciences. |
| 2. No calling is higher or more noble _____ | b. however if love were easy, we'd all be good at it. |
| 3. You can earn all A's _____ | c. but none argued that schools should hire math teachers. |
| 4. The truck driver learned how to read, and his world expanded _____ | d. similarly my English student's world was broadened: she learned how she wanted to live. |
| 5. Imagine that our citizens insisted that $2+2=93$ or that $3 \times 3=85$ _____ | e. than that of the peacemaker. |
| 6. Who does not feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem or feel nearly helpless by the smallness of one's personal response _____ | f. but go out and flunk life. |
| 7. Newspaper editorials criticized the ignorance and called for committees to study the problem _____ | g. nevertheless we must not be stopped by these challenges. |

1. Peace is the result of love. However, if love were easy, we'd all be good at it.
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

7 Summary Writing. Put the sentences in the box below in order on page 7 to create a summary of McCarthy’s essay. Two sentences have been done for you as examples.

- a. Specifically, he argues that prayer, service and non-violence are the essential ingredients.
- b. Second, McCarthy maintains that a life of peace and fulfillment requires service.
- c. ~~Children, he writes, should be asked how they want to serve when they grow up, not simply what they want to be.~~
- d. First, McCarthy discusses “prayer.”
- e. In his article “Do Small Things in a Great Way,” Colman McCarthy discusses the necessary elements to achieve personal and societal peace.
- f. ~~McCarthy explains that this approach to life is where individuals will find joy and meaning.~~
- g. Furthermore, McCarthy notes that experiential learning is an important pathway to service and to practical education.
- h. He explains that he is not referring to prayer in the religious sense nor is he referring to the type of prayer that asks for something such as health or a better job.
- i. Rather, he wants us to ask how we should be using our gifts, and then to act.
- j. Third, McCarthy states that we must become “literate” in peace.
- k. McCarthy notes that one important way to take such action is to help and push others to discover their own gifts.
- l. Studying theories in books is not enough.
- m. To do this, we should read authors such as Gandhi, King, Sojourner Truth and Eugene Debs.
- n. McCarthy is concerned that so much money is spent supporting our wars and so little on supporting peace and the study of non-violence.
- o. Until this is corrected, McCarthy suggests, we must each do the “small things in a great way” – prayer, service and non-violence – to move ourselves and our society toward the ways of love and peace.
- p. In addition to experiential learning, McCarthy asserts that it is our duty to appreciate the gifts we have been given, such as our talents, health and opportunities, and to help others accordingly.

Summary of "Do Small Things in a Great Way" by Colman McCarthy

1) _____
_____ 2) _____

3) _____ 4) _____

5) _____
_____ 6) _____

7) _____
8) Children, he writes, should be asked how they want to serve when they grow up, not simply what they want to be. 9) McCarthy explains that this approach to life is where individuals will find joy and meaning. 10) _____

11) _____ 12) _____

13) _____ 14) _____

_____ 15) _____

_____ 16) _____

8 Language Focus: Reporting Information. Review the “Reporting Information” section of the [Word Combination Card](#). Then create sentences based on the summary using the chart below. Use all of the verbs in the chart and add a final –s to each of them as necessary. Try to paraphrase the “information” from the chart (do not copy it word for word). The first one has been done as an example.

Subject	Verb	Information
McCarthy	argue	the necessary elements to achieve personal and societal peace
	assert	that prayer, service and non-violence are the essential ingredients
	discuss	that a life of peace and fulfillment requires service
	explain	that this approach to life is where individuals will find joy and meaning
	is concerned	that experiential learning is an important pathway to service and to a practical education
	maintain	that it is our duty to appreciate the gifts we have been given
	note	that we must become “literate” in peace
	state	that so much money is spent supporting our wars

1. McCarthy argues that prayer, service and non-violence are necessary to reach this goal.
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

9 Reflection Questions. Discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. Do you agree with Colman McCarthy’s philosophy? Why or why not?
2. Have you had any experience with serving your community? Was (or is) it a valuable experience for you? Explain.