

Gandhi - Teachers' Notes

STUDY GUIDE

This study guide has been written for use at Key Stage 4 and GCSE History and Media Studies. It gives a background to the history of the British in India, and the rise of Indian Nationalism. There are also four media studies exercises within the guide which concentrate on film genre and the 'biographical' film, stereotypes in film, character development and film technique and the language of film.

Certificate: PG

Director: Richard Attenborough

SYNOPSIS

Sweeping account of the life and times of Mohanadas K. Gandhi, who rose from a position of simple lawyer to become a nation's leader and a worldwide symbol of peace and understanding.

Teachers' Background Notes

"Men say I am a saint losing myself in politics. The fact is I am a politician trying my hardest to be a saint."

Gandhi himself always recognised the dual role he was playing in history. We hope that in this study guide we will raise several points and issues which are pertinent to the course you are studying - points and issues which are dealt with in the film "Gandhi".

Gandhi became the prime mover in India's struggle for independence and yet, at the same time, he was a spiritual leader whose philosophy was to influence millions. And it is these two threads which run through the film. Though, almost inevitably, it is his political role which tends to dominate for reasons which are worth studying.

In the title sequence, Richard Attenborough admits that by necessity the film is selective - how else to cover a life of some 70 years in 3 hours? Only the major events can be covered, and in cinematic terms there are natural constraints to what is filmable. A filmmaker owes it to his audience to entertain them. Yet it is also important to note that his financial backers and the film's distributors will expect the film to contain aspects of Gandhi's life which will attract audiences to cinemas. The filmmaker must always bear these two points in mind.

In terms of drama, therefore, the vital core is the struggle for India's independence - and the means by which this was achieved. This is not to belittle Gandhi's spiritual role. This is used as a lyrical and meditative counterpoint to the struggles against the British Empire - and is also used in the film as a means of contrasting the two separate cultures and the attitudes

that move them. Perhaps a striking example of this is seen in the differing methods used to make a political point.

Gandhi declared that "my opponent must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy". Above all he preached and practised a policy of non-violence. Just how effective was this policy and what kind of reaction did it provoke from the British? And it is worth comparing with the motives of General Dyer who ordered the Amritsar Massacre: "I had made up my mind. I would do all the men to death... I thought I would be doing a jolly lot of good". Two totally contrasting methods of making a political point, demonstrated in the film - but how? Attenborough shows the massacre and then, in the scene at the salt mine, shows us lines of Indians queuing up to be struck down by baton-wielding soldiers. Whose point prevails? And, more importantly, with whom does the audience identify?

Gandhi's approach was based on a very simple philosophy, and one which he was always to remain true to: "What I did was a very ordinary thing. I declared that the British could not order me around in my own country."

It is therefore worth examining the ways in which Attenborough shows Gandhi attempting to achieve his goal. How are the British represented? Is there a change in their attitudes and manners? And, in contrast, what of the Indian politicians? How do Jinnah and Nehru change as the film progresses? Above all, what of Gandhi himself? Whilst groups of English governors and military men sit in almost regal splendour, discussing what to do with the Indians - and as Jinnah, Nehru and the others can be seen deliberately imitating the British way and becoming more and more "westernised" (in simple terms their clothes and their attitude to the "people") how is Gandhi seen? Why did he adopt a particular life style and refuse the trappings that were available to him had he so wished? He himself said: "For me nothing in the political world is more important than the spinning wheel". Why ?

Perhaps his greatest ability, which Attenborough is at pains to point out, was his insight. He knew who his enemies were. The British were the obvious target but he realised that things were not (and still aren't) that simple. Oppression does not take place purely for its own sake. Political, economic, religious and cultural forces were at work at all times and affected both the British stand and the Indian response.

The creation of a united front against Imperialism was paramount.

"I fasted to reform those who loved me. You cannot fast against a tyrant".

What exactly did Gandhi mean by these words? Here religion becomes an important issue, an issue which was to become an almost greater hurdle to overcome than ridding the continent of the British. As independence became inevitable, the gulf widened between Hindu and Moslem (Muslim). Which ultimately begs the question as to exactly how successful Gandhi was. The creation of two states, India and Pakistan, could be seen as a

failure. And with the benefit of hindsight - the Indo-Pakistan war, the bloody creation of Bangladesh - perhaps it was. Yet at the time was there an alternative?

This leads to another fascinating area - the role of Jinnah. How is he presented in the film? He achieved his goal, in a radically different way from Gandhi's. Perhaps his is the success story.

Yet that is to stray from the film. And to divert from its main strength which is that of Gandhi the man. We see a well-dressed young Indian lawyer thrown from a train in South Africa. We see, later an old Indian, dressed in a loincloth, conducting negotiations with the British which are to result in the creation of an independent India. In fact Gandhi is rarely off the screen. We watch him at his farm, speaking to his many admirers. We see him fast and prepare to die for his beliefs. Throughout, it is difficult not to respect him. Millions of Indians did. He was a man of the people. "I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me". It is this that won him the hearts of India. To say he failed politically is perhaps too glib. For in historical terms he gave the Indian a voice and a hope. It is this the film pays tribute to.

GANDHI - A CHRONOLOGY

1869 - 2 October. Gandhi born at Porbandar.

1883 - Married to Kasturba.

1887 - Leaves India for England. Commences legal studies

1893 - Arrives in South Africa.

1899 - Boer War. Forms volunteer ambulance brigade for British Army.

1908 - Gaoled for first time for promoting rights of Indians in South Africa.

1915 - Returns to India.

1919 - Amritsar massacre.

1921 - Arrested and tried. Sentenced to six years imprisonment for sedition.

1924 - Appendix removed. Released from prison. Fasts for three weeks for Hindu-Muslim unity following riots in North West Frontier Province.

1928 - Boycotts Dimon Commission investigating government of India.

1930 - Salt March to Dandi. Inaugurates mass civil disobedience campaign. Picket of Dharshana Salt Works. Suppressed by Government police and troops.

1931 - Negotiations with Viceroy, Lord Irwin, end civil disobedience. Comes to London for Second Round Table Conference on Indian Constitutional reform.

1932 - Fasts on behalf of the Untouchables.

1934 - Withdraws from Indian National Congress to concentrate on rural reform.

1936 - Settles in ashram at Sevagram.

1942 - Leads "Quit India" movement against the British. Imprisoned for last time.

1944 - Death of Kasturba Gandhi. Negotiations with Jinnah over Pakistan.

1947 - Ends communal rioting in Calcutta during transition to Independence.

1948 - Last fast in Delhi. Assassinated by Hindu extremist.

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAUD GANDHI 1869-1948

"I used to be very shy and avoided company ... To be at school at the hour and to run back home as soon as the school closed - that was my daily habit ... because I could not bear to talk to anybody." (1)

This is the childhood memory of Mohandas Karamchaud Gandhi, who was born at Porbandar, on the coast of the Arabian Sea. When he was shot dead by a Hindu assassin in 1948, newspaper headlines proclaimed: "Gandhi is killed by a Hindu: India shaken, world mourns". (2)

The story of Gandhi's boyhood seems to have been like many others in the Kathiawar peninsula, and his personality hardly reflected the ingredients for greatness. And yet, he became "The Mahatma" (3) whose goal was to make India free from British rule. Moreover, when India finally gained independence from Britain in 1947, other possessions were soon to follow, and during the next 15 years almost 100 colonies of Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, gained independence.

Gandhi was married at the age of 13, an experience he recalled as meaning "nothing more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners and a strange girl to play with". Six years later he went to study law in London, where he became a barrister. Before he left India he took a solemn oath never to touch wine, women or meat.

By 1891 Gandhi returned to India, but was not very successful in his chosen career, so he accepted a job with a trading company in South Africa. Very quickly he became the victim of the humiliating treatment meted out to Indians. He was thrown off a train simply because of his colour. But he saw this incident as "a symptom of the disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process". For 21 years, Gandhi devoted his energies to fighting the cause of Indians in South Africa. In his "fight" he used the weapon of Satyagraha - Satya meaning "truth" and "Agraha" meaning "force".

In 1915, Gandhi returned to India, and founded an ashram (a commune), where he and his followers lived an essentially religious life of simplicity, making their own clothes, and even spinning their own cloth.

But by 1918, Gandhi had become the leading figure of the nationalist movement and from 1920 he devoted his life to non-violent non co-operation with the British government in India. He had two aims in his work; to get the British out of India and to improve the condition of the Indian masses.

(1) "Readings from Gandhi"

(2) New York Times, Saturday, January 13, 1948

(3) meaning "Great Soul"

Worksheet 1

1. Explain why Gandhi first became involved in politics in South Africa.
2. What method did he evolve to fight colour prejudice there?
3. What do you think Gandhi's attitude towards the British was during this period of his life?
4. In what ways do you think Gandhi's later career might have been influenced by his early life?

Research topics

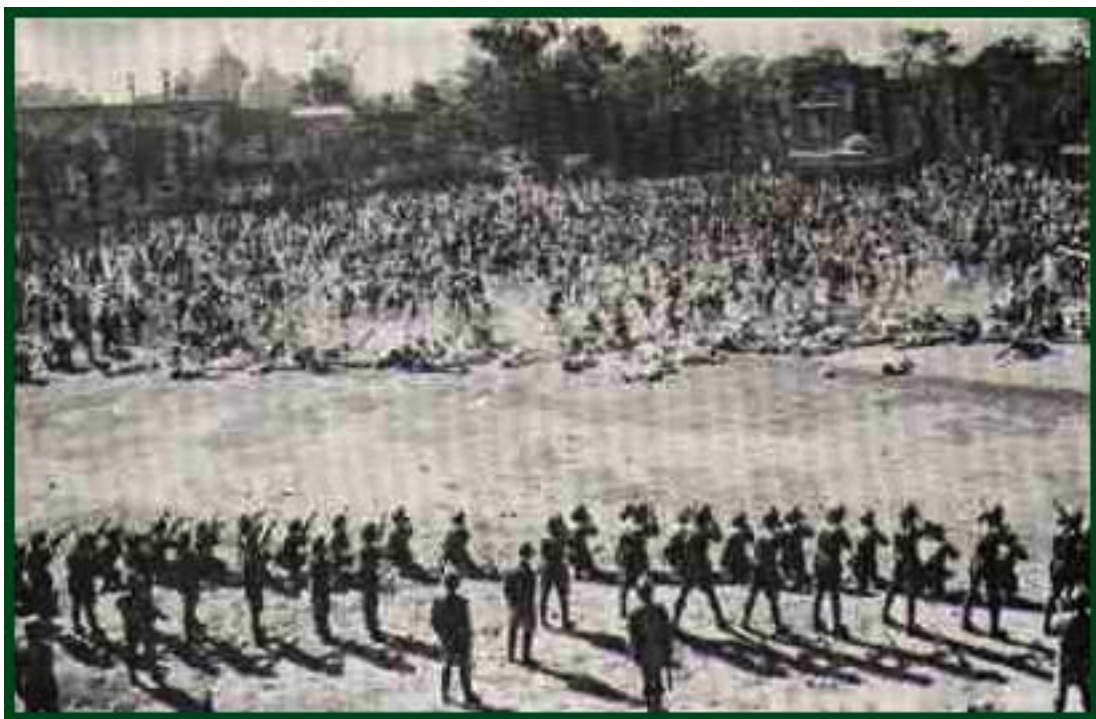
1. Find out what the traditional Hindu beliefs and practices are concerning:
 - a) diet,
 - b) marriage.
2. Write a biographical account of:
 - a) Jawaharlal Nehru,
 - b) Mohhamed Ali Jinnah.

Write an account of Gandhi's life written from the point of view of his wife Kasturba. You could stress your fears for his safety, your obedience to his wishes, and your admiration for his deeds.

THE BRITISH IN INDIA

The support Britain gained from India during the First World War, led both the National Congress and the Muslim League to call for a stronger elected element in government. This was provided in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, but was insufficient to stem the tide of post-war discontent. The British government in its concern for the maintenance of order, passed the Rowcatt Acts - a set of repressive measures to be used against opposition.

In response Gandhi called for a "Hatal" - a one day general strike, of peaceful non-violent protest. Tension mounted for the British government and this led to the massacre at Amritsar where 379 unarmed civilians were killed and 1,137 wounded.



General Dyer testified before the Hunter Committee, which was appointed to inquire into the massacre:

"It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd but one of producing a sufficient moral effect. My intention was to inflict a lesson that would have an impact throughout all India."

After the massacre Gandhi was convinced that "the British government today represents Satanism".

Questions

1. Explain how tension mounted, culminating in the Amritsar massacre. (You will find more about this from the suggested books).
2. Describe what happened at Amritsar and say why it marked a turning point in Gandhi's attitude towards the British.

Tasks

1. Design a recruitment poster which the British might have used in India before the First World War.
2. Design a poster which Indian nationalists might have produced, condemning British action at Amritsar.
3. Compose a list of questions you might have asked General Dyer if you had been interrogating him at the Hunter Committee inquiry.

INDIAN NATIONALISM

BACKGROUND

Following the establishment of trading posts on the coasts of the Indian subcontinent by various European powers, and two centuries of intermittent hostilities both against each other and against local rulers, the British had emerged by 1820 as the undisputed successors to the Mogul Emperors. Although, officially, what came to be known as British India Company (as authorised by a charter granted by Queen Elizabeth 1) in fact, the British Indian Empire was established. Treaties were concluded with the other parts of India - the ostensibly independent states whose Maharajas ruled their territories with British advisers at their elbows.

THE SEPOY WAR or INDIAN MUTINY

On 10 May 1857 units of the Indian Army mutinied against their British officers. The rebellion spread rapidly but was confined to a relatively small area taking in the United Provinces, parts of Bengal and Delhi. It was put down with savagery on both sides. The immediate cause of the mutiny was the smearing of musket cartridges with the fat of cows and pigs - an insult to both Hindus and Muslims. But the cause was symptomatic of a much wider disenchantment with the ways in which British rulers had disregarded, and trampled on, what ordinary Indians regarded as essential parts of their way of life. The Indian Mutiny could therefore be interpreted as having been inspired by Indian Nationalist feelings - but, as yet, lacking a specifically political dimension. The motivation was cultural and religious.

AFTER 1858

Following the establishment of the Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras as well as other Western-style institutions of education, and Queen Victoria's Proclamation stressing the principles of religious toleration and racial justice, the 1860's and 70's saw the rise of a new Indian middle class, inspired both by a revival of interest in their own indigenous cultures and, more importantly, by the influx of Western liberal ideas spearheaded by the works of the Utilitarians. These young men (not women, be it noted - Feminism was unheard of though there were one or two remarkable exceptions) started meeting together in the capital cities, forming clubs and associations and increasingly agitating for a greater share in the running of their own country at all levels. The culmination of this activity was the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

For twenty years the I.N.C. remained a respectable, constitutional British-inspired pressure group. Except that, during the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1898-1905) they started to split into two factions, led by the moderate Gokhale and the extremist Tilak. In 1907, following the partition of the state of Bengal along communal (i.e. religious) lines and the consequential appearance of a terrorist movement in that province and elsewhere, the split became irreconcilable and Tilak was shortly afterwards sentenced to six years' imprisonment for incitement to murder. A year earlier, the Muslim League had been formed in Northern India out of fear that the Hindus, being in very much a majority, would swamp the aspirations of Muslims in the I.N.C. The membership of both organisations grew considerably. One influence was that of contemporary events in the Middle and Far East - Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905, The Nationalist Young Turk and Persian movements of 1908 and 1909 and the Chinese Revolution of 1911. By the outbreak of the First World War, the Imperial Government of India had inaugurated the cautious Morley-Minto reforms which were meant to lead, eventually, to the establishment of responsible parliamentary government. For the time being, agitation ceased. However, there was a flaw. Certain constituencies were set aside for Muslims alone a decision which turned out to be the thin end of a wedge which would, 37 years alter, lead to the division of India and the creation of Pakistan.

FIRST WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the First World War inspired support for the Allied cause from Indians generally, including Nationalists. But, as the war proceeded, a gradual disenchantment with the British Raj set in. The increase of Indian association with government suddenly ceased. They saw what happened to Irish Home Rule. They were strongly affected by the Russian Revolution. Too much grain was being exported to Britain and the British forces, which led to considerable financial hardship in India. For Muslims, the Sultan of Turkey was their spiritual leader and here was that leader driven to defeat and final disaster by Great Britain and her allies. No wonder that Indian Nationalism, by 1919, led once more by Tilak (Gokhale had died) was in a state of militancy. The British had produced a further measure - the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms - designed to widen the participation of Indians in government. But the Indian Government had just passed, through fear of a recrudescence of the terrorist movement, the notorious Rowlatt Bills, involving extensive powers of detention without trial. They were counterproductive and inspired peaceful protest. One such protest was at Amritsar where, in a large enclosed space, more than 1,500 men, women and children were killed or wounded by troops commanded by General Dyer. This became the signal for the last phase of Indian Nationalism to be launched under a new leader.

GANDHI

M.K. Gandhi has returned to India in 1915 after a twenty year sojourn in South Africa, where he had successfully led the Indian community in a struggle for their rights and had developed the techniques of peaceful resistance which he was to use in India. His belief in the virtues of the British and their Empire (illustrated by his work as a recruiting agent for the Indian Army during his first two years in India) became quickly shattered by the events leading up to Amritsar. By 1921 he had become leader of Congress and was to remain so, whether officially or unofficially, until his death in 1948. The principle behind Gandhi's actions was, according to Percival Spear, "non-co-operation with evil" and the weapon "resignation from all government offices, exodus from educational bodies and boycott of all elections". The methods were to be strictly non-violent. Evil laws were to be resisted. The overall object was to touch the conscience of the opponent - in this case the panoply and might of the Imperial Raj. Gandhi was the greatest of the world's Nationalist leaders because of his complete identification, in practice as well as in declaration, with the people of India's 700,000 villages. In their eyes he was, as well as a great leader, a saint, or guru, and so they called him Mahatma or Great Soul. It was he alone who converted Indian Nationalism from a middle-class movement to a mass movement. He used methods they understood, like the Khaddar movement (home produced clothes, not foreign) and, thus, compulsory cotton spinning for all members of Congress, and the making and eating of salt, without paying the hated salt tax. He always appealed to the good sense in others. He unceasingly preached the reform of his own people, particularly in support of the Untouchable community (where he was often opposed by orthodox Hindus). He believed that Nationalists should be as much concerned at reforming themselves as gaining their rights. He perfected the

weapon of the fast - several times he was at death's door - entered into always at times when he claimed to have been morally certain of its rightness (and, naturally, interpreted by the British as blackmail). He turned Congress into a truly Nationalist organisation (The Muslim League, led by Mohamed Ali Jinnah, represented Muslims only). And he introduced a moral dimension into Nationalist movements which can be seen in the leadership of such men as Martin Luther King in America.

GANDHI - A FILM STUDY GUIDE

As we watch films, we lose ourselves in the narrative, get involved with the characters. It is all too easy to believe that the film just "happens", that the sequence of pictures that appear on the screen have naturally fallen into place. This, of course, is far from the truth. A film is "constructed", carefully put together so that, if it is successful, the effect described above will happen. The exercises that you will find in this study guide should help you to see the processes that take place in order to guide and influence your understanding of a film.

In "Gandhi", Sir Richard Attenborough, the director, is trying to give us a portrait of the leader of the Indian Nationalist movement. At the beginning of the film a caption states that the film shows "the spirit of the record - the heart of the man". Yet the director is faced with a problem. He is telling us the life story of a man about whom we may have little knowledge, set in a country about whose culture and people we may only know through television programmes and previous films that we have seen. In the images that he creates, he must give us both the "spirit" and the "heart", explain to us the social and political situations that exist whilst also keeping our interest in the developing story.

Before starting the first exercise, you might want to consider why the film starts with the murder and funeral of Gandhi. How does this affect the way that we watch the film? What clues are we given that we might wish to follow as the story progresses?

EXERCISE 1 - "Gandhi" and the biographical film

When we see a horror or a gangster film we have certain expectations as to what situations and characters we will see. The director can use conventions to suggest to us who is the hero, who is the villain and we will automatically assume such things as where they will live, what their actions will be. Below is a simple example.

Vampire:

wears black cloak → wing collared shirt → castle on remote hillside
→ sinking fangs into necks → eventual death by stake through heart.

You might like to try this exercise with some of the following types of characters:

- the sheriff,
- "the dumb blonde"
- the gangster
- the Indian chief
- the Western outlaw.

There are also certain plot conventions which will appear in these types of film:

- the gunfight in the western,
- the car chase in the gangster.

In making a film biography, however the director does not always have these devices that we can use. Attenborough has to create a believable character in Gandhi, must try to show us the "heart of the man".

1. What problems do you think Attenborough faced when he came to make "Gandhi" when, for example, he was casting the film and during the actual shooting?
2. What would he have had to pay particular attention to, considering that most of the film was shot on location and that the time scale of the story covers approximately 55 years, from the 1890's to 1948?
3. What problems could arise from making a film about someone who died within living memory?

EXERCISE 2 - Stereotypes

Although the film is over three hours long, this is a short time to tell the life of a man who lived until he was 78. As much of Gandhi's life was spent fighting British prejudice and colonialism, Attenborough has to give us information about the conflict. However, within the confines of the film, he must get this across to the audience as quickly and efficiently as possible, so as not to detract from the story that he is telling. He can rely on our having knowledge of certain aspects of the conflict, even if in an indirect way.

Look at three images, A, B and C. For each image, list:

- a) the actor,
- b) what type of role you associate the actor with,
- c) their appearance in the image - their clothes, etc.

What does each image suggest to you about possible attitudes, beliefs, etc., that the characters might hold? Do they appear as kindly, well-meaning men?

From the notes that you have made, try to come to some idea of the British attitudes in India at the time of Gandhi. Do they agree with what you saw in the film?

IMAGE A



IMAGE B



IMAGE C



EXERCISE 3 - Gandhi - character development

Whilst Attenborough can use stereotypes of the British to bring to mind the ideas that we already have about the Empire and its rulers, he has a different problem with Gandhi and the Indians. Because he is trying to show development of one man's life and the forces which influenced him, he cannot rely on stereotypes - for a stereotype character, by its very nature, does not change. He also has to suggest Gandhi's relationship with the other Indian leaders and with his followers and how this changed.

The way that change in character can be represented in film is through changing the appearance of the character and by changing his/her relationship to surroundings and other characters within the film in a visual way.

Look at image D. Describe very carefully what you can see, referring to people, clothing and place. Try to describe the relationship between the people in the image and what their positions within the image suggest.

What does the way that Gandhi is dressed suggest to you?

Now look at image E and carry out the same process.

IMAGE D



IMAGE E



EXERCISE 4 - Framing

A director can influence the way that we "see" a character or situation by the positioning of the characters within the picture or frame. Below you will see illustrated the three basic "frame positions".

It is important to see where characters are in relation to each other and also the scenery in order to try and understand the possible intention of the director.

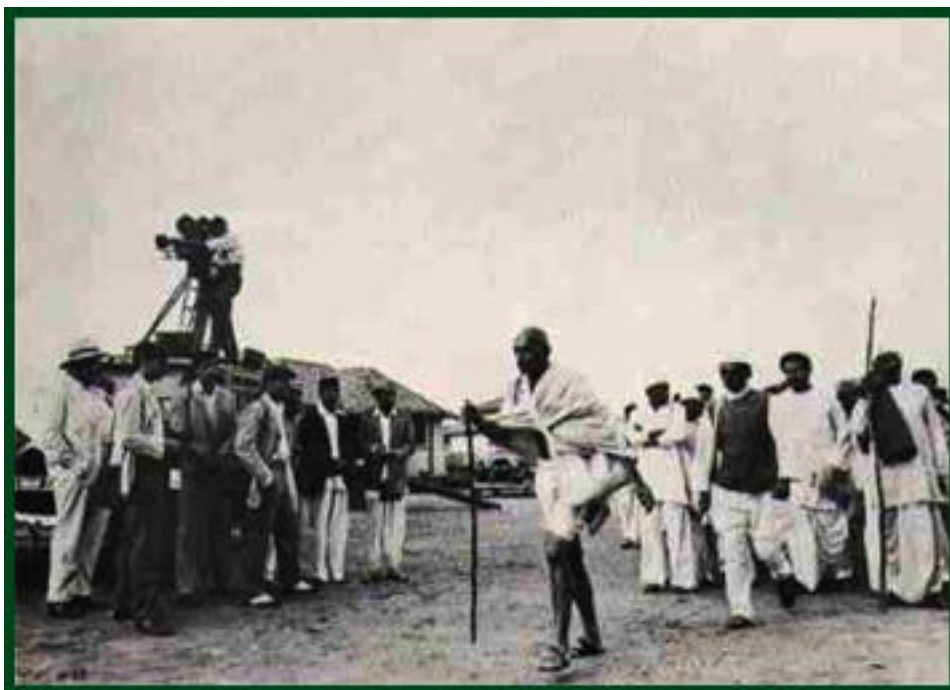
In images F and G describe where the various characters are (e.g. middle foreground, left background), where the scene is set, the relationship of the character to what is happening and what overall relationship is suggested by the image. You should pay close attention to such things as dress, objects in the scene and their effect on what you see.



IMAGE F



IMAGE G



GANDHI - A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

C.S.E. and O Level History

Gandhi - F.W. Rawding. (Cambridge Univ. Press.)

India and Pakistan in the 20th Century - Richard Thames (Batsford)

Gandhi - Malcolm Yapp (Harrap World History)

India, The Crowded Country - Jill A. Wright (Longman)

Gandhi - Richard Thames with Peter Robb and David Taylor (Sussex Tapes)

A Level History and Politics

Gandhi - An Autobiography (Cape)

The Indian Nationalist Movement 1885-1947. Selected Documents. Ed. B.N. Pandey

Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles - Ved Mehta (Penguin)

Gandhi - George Woodcock (Fontana Modern Masters)

The Life of Mahatma Gandhi - Luis Fischer (Cape)

Gandhi - William L. Shirer (Abacus)

Teacher Background

The School of Oriental and African Studies have published many booklets on various aspects of India and on Gandhi. Particularly useful is "India, Pakistan and Bangladesh - A Handbook for Teachers" by Patricia Bahree.

Media Studies:

Students

Eyeopeners - Andrew Bethel (Cambridge Education)

Reading Pictures - BFI Education

Teachers

Signs and Meaning in the Cinema - Peter Wollen (Secker and Warburg)

Semiology - Pierra Guirard (RKP)

Screen Reader 1 - SEFT

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