

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## How Salt Shook an Empire

By Sara Wilson Etienne  
2007

*Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), also known as Mahatmas Gandhi, was an Indian activist and leader in the Indian independence movement against the British rule in India. In this informational text, Sara Wilson Etienne discusses Gandhi's march to the sea to protest a law put in place by the British Empire. As you read, take notes on how Gandhi peacefully protested against the British Empire.*

[1] Thousands of people gathered at the edge of a sea. Ears strained<sup>1</sup> to catch the first words spoken. Cameras hovered, ready to snap a picture. All eyes were on the small man in loose white robes standing calmly by the shore. They were waiting for Mohandas Gandhi to commit a crime.



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Gandhi was not a common criminal. In fact, he was such an uncommon person that he was often called Mahatma, meaning "Great Soul." Sixty-year-old Gandhi was fighting for the independence of his country, India, from the British Empire. But he was leading the people of India in a revolution<sup>2</sup> without guns or bombs. "I, too, am a fighter," he said. "I want to teach them how to fight without violence — how to fight without fear."

On March 12, 1930, Gandhi set out to wield<sup>3</sup> the weapon of peace. With his bamboo walking stick and 78 followers, Gandhi journeyed 240 miles to break the law; his crime would be to gather salt from the sea. But how could that be against the law? And why salt?

In the intense heat of India, people needed to eat salt to stay alive. Fortunately, salt could be found easily — dried on mud flats near the ocean, in salt mines, and by boiling seawater. But the British government — which ruled India at that time — made it a crime for people to make their own salt. They said people could only buy salt from the government. On top of that, they

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1. **Strain** (*verb*) to make a serious effort
  2. to end a government's control and put another in power
  3. to hold or use a weapon or tool

charged a tax<sup>4</sup> on salt.

- [5] For the poorest people, who had barely enough money to buy food to eat, the salt tax was the harshest<sup>5</sup> of all British laws. For women, who used salt constantly in the kitchen, this law was a personal challenge. Gandhi's salt march inspired many to action.

Before he began his march to the sea, Gandhi had tried meeting with government officials. He had tried writing letters. Nothing had worked. Gandhi decided that if he couldn't work within the law, he would stand against it. So he began to walk.

Gandhi walked 10 miles a day on hot, dusty roads through small villages. People lined the roads to see him pass. As Gandhi walked, more and more people joined him. Their numbers grew into the thousands. When he passed Indians working for the British government, they resigned from their jobs in support of Gandhi's protest. Women from all over the country came to join the peaceful fight.

After 24 days, Gandhi arrived at the village of Dandi. Early the next morning, he went to the ocean and walked into the waves. When he came out, he stood in front of an enormous crowd gathered before him. Gandhi bent down and picked up some crusted salt that lay dried on the beach. "With this," he said, holding up the salt, "I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire."

Gandhi was smart to believe in the power of salt. In a wave of civil disobedience,<sup>6</sup> Indians began making their own salt and selling it to others. One hundred thousand people were thrown into jail for defying<sup>7</sup> the salt laws. As Indian jails filled up, the world began to sympathize<sup>8</sup> with India's struggles. Under pressure, the British government offered a truce<sup>9</sup> to Gandhi. They agreed to change the salt laws and free prisoners. With a pinch of salt and a peaceful march, India took its first big step toward winning independence.

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4. an additional cost that goes to the government
5. **Harsh (adjective)** cruel or severe
6. the refusal to follow certain laws or pay taxes as a peaceful form of protest
7. **Defy (verb)** to openly resist or refuse to obey
8. **Sympathize (verb)** to feel sorry for someone
9. an agreement between enemies to stop fighting or argument

*subscriptions.*

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the central idea of the text?
  - A. It took longer for Gandhi to create positive change in India because he refused to use violence.
  - B. Gandhi was not arrested for making his own salt, as it was considered a small crime by the government.
  - C. Only the British were allowed to make their own salt, which Indians were forced to steal it in order to survive.
  - D. Gandhi peacefully protested the British tax of salt to bring about change in India.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "All eyes were on the small man in loose white robes standing calmly by the shore. They were waiting for Mohandas Gandhi to commit a crime." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "But the British government—which ruled India at that time—made it a crime for people to make their own salt." (Paragraph 4)
  - C. "For the poorest people, who had barely enough money to buy food to eat, the salt tax was the harshest of all British laws." (Paragraph 5)
  - D. "Gandhi bent down and picked up some crusted salt that lay dried on the beach. 'With this,' he said, holding up the salt, 'I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.'" (Paragraph 8)
  
3. Which alternate title best expresses the main idea of the passage?
  - A. Mahatma Gandhi's Life and Death
  - B. How Gandhi Challenged the Salt Tax
  - C. Why the People of India Needed Salt
  - D. The British Empire's Takeover of India
  
4. Which of the following describes the problem that prompted Gandhi to take part in civil disobedience?
  - A. The British government forced people to buy taxed salt from them.
  - B. The British government used violence to control the people of India.
  - C. The British government removed the supply of salt from India
  - D. The British government unfairly took control of India.

5. How does the text help readers understand the connection between peaceful protest and positive change?

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