

AGENDA

- Starter
- The Latest Word Is...
- Power Check
- In Control
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize the power of their words.

Students will recognize that people are responsible for what they say.

Students will evaluate and choose words to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between their words and the consequences.

Materials Needed

- One copy of the “Check Your Grip” activity sheet for each student (Part II)

Starter (2 minutes)

Begin class today by writing the following equation on the board: “speaker + listener = communication.” Ask students if they recognize it. Confirm responses that point out that the class talked about this equation, and listening skills in particular, during the last lesson.

Circle the word “speaker” in the equation, and tell students that they’re going to focus on this part of the equation and its importance to communication. Leave the equation on the board for use at the end of the lesson.

Part I The Latest Word Is... (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the power of their words.

1. Students consider the power of a word.

Tell students to imagine that they saw a shirt or heard a song they especially liked. Ask how they would describe this particular item to a friend. Get them to focus on a single word, such as “cool,” or another word or phrase that is currently popular among your students.

Then, focus on the power of this word by saying, “It matters what word you use. Everyone knows what this word means because everyone uses it to mean the same thing. Do you think people will ever use a different word for that intended meaning?”

2. Students discuss the ways that language changes.

Share with students some of the words or phrases that were popular when you were younger, and encourage responses that recognize how strange those words or phrases sound now. Have students think of words or phrases that were popular in the past.

Brainstorm with students a list of currently popular words and phrases, and write student responses on the board. When the list is complete, have students make predictions regarding the words they think will still be popular a generation from now, and those that they think will pass.

3. Students discuss the power of language.

Ask students to describe what their choice of words might say about them.

Lead students to realize that what we say gives people an impression about us. Provide students with some examples other than “cool” (e.g., a common regional saying that people from other areas would find odd, a friend who commonly uses academic words). Explain to students that we have the power to affect what people think about us by using words carefully.

Point out that different words are appropriate in different settings. Explain that it is important to know how to use language that is appropriate for the situation. Explain to students that this lesson will help them learn to use words appropriately.

Part II Power Check (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that people are responsible for what they say.

1. Students listen to a story.

Tell students that you are going to read a short story to them. Explain that they should listen carefully to what the characters say. Read the following story aloud:

Anthony and Thomas are locking their bicycles one morning. They don't see Mike sitting on the grass nearby. Anthony says to Thomas, "You want to do something after school today?"

"I sort of told Mike I'd do something with him," says Thomas.

"Mike? He's such a jerk," says Anthony. "And he dresses like such a dork!"

"Oh yeah?" says Thomas. "Well, I better be going. Bye!"

Later that day in the gym, Anthony waves and runs up to talk to Mike. But Mike walks away, pretending not to see him.

"What's wrong with him?" Anthony says loudly. "What a jerk!"

2. Students discuss the story.

Prompt a discussion about the story by asking questions such as the following:

- Why do you think Mike avoids Anthony in the gym? (Mike is angry at Anthony because he heard Anthony calling him names and putting him down earlier in the day.)
- Suppose you were in the gym and saw what happened between Mike and Anthony. Would you side with Anthony? Why or why not?
- Who is responsible for what happened in the gym—Mike or Anthony? Why? (Students should recognize that Anthony is responsible because of what he said about Mike earlier in the day.)
- What were the consequences of Anthony’s words in the beginning of the story? What about his words in the gym? (At first, only Thomas and Mike heard Anthony’s comment, and it hurt Mike’s feelings. Everyone in the gym heard Anthony’s comment, and it could affect how they see Anthony or Mike.)
- Do you think Anthony realized the power of his words? Explain your answer.
- What about Thomas? How do you think he handled himself? (Thomas did not defend his friend.)
- What do you think would have happened if Thomas had defended Mike?

Conclude the discussion by saying, “You have the power to speak or not to speak. You have the power to choose what you say and to whom you speak, so be careful and think about the consequences of your words. You must take responsibility for them. Remember that the words that come out of your mouth are yours.”

3. Students respond to a personal inventory.

Distribute copies of the “Check Your Grip” activity sheet. Assure students that they will not be asked to share any answers with the class, so they should respond to each statement honestly.

After students have finished, point out that people often forget how powerful their words can be and how they can affect others. Suggest that students keep this inventory and look at it occasionally as a reminder of the power that their words have.

Part III In Control (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students evaluate and choose words to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between words and consequences.

1. Students consider what they have learned about verbal communication.

Introduce this activity by reminding students of the story about Anthony, Thomas, and Mike. Remind them of the power that Anthony’s words had: he used them to hurt Mike’s feelings and make Mike look bad in front of others. Ask volunteers to recall how Thomas chose to use his words. (Thomas didn’t defend his friend.)

2. Students apply what they have learned.

Explain to students that they are going to rewrite the story. Ask students to take out a sheet of paper. Have them follow your directions carefully as they revise the story. Explain to students that the directions will be given one at a time, and that they will have an opportunity to write after each direction is given. Remind them to think about the possible consequences of the words they choose before deciding on a response.

Reread the story from Part II out loud. Give each set of directions below, one at a time. Allow students a minute or two to write their responses; then, ask volunteers to share what they wrote. Discuss how the changes affect the rest of the story; then, go on to the next set of directions.

- Thomas tells Anthony that he is planning to do something with Mike after school. Write a different response from Anthony that won't cause any messes. ("Can I come? Let's talk to Mike.")
- Anthony calls Mike a jerk and says that he dresses like a dork. Write a response from Thomas that would also hurt Mike's feelings and maybe even end their friendship. ("Yeah, he is. Maybe I'll just ditch him after school.")
- Anthony calls Mike a jerk and says that he dresses like a dork. Write a response from Thomas that would let Anthony know that he is responsible for his words and that Thomas likes hanging out with Mike. ("He isn't. If you make nasty comments about Mike behind his back, I wonder what you say about me behind my back.")
- In the gym, Mike walks away from Anthony, and Anthony calls him a name. Write a response that would have kept Anthony from making things worse. (Anthony could have said nothing. He also could have gone after Mike and asked him what was wrong. Anthony could have figured out that Mike overheard him talking to Thomas and apologized.)

Conclusion (3 minutes)

Refer to the equation on the board, and ask students to identify who they think has the most power in this equation—the speaker or the listener. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Words are very powerful, so use them wisely.
- You must take responsibility for your words because they belong to you.

Student Assessment

1. Describe a situation in which you said something that you wished you could take back. Why did you want to take it back?
2. How does your use of words influence what others think about you?
3. Describe a situation in which the words someone uses have a negative effect. Then, rewrite the situation, making the person use words that have a positive effect.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.”

Have students come up with other word pairs that are near misses and create illustrations of both the “right” and the “almost right” word.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students play password, a vocabulary game that requires teams with two players each. Give a “password” (printed on a card) to one member of each team. Have them take turns giving one-word clues to their partners. Each password is worth 10 points when it’s given out, decreasing one point as each clue is given. There are no penalties for guessing incorrectly.

Have students discuss how they had to be careful with their words in this game.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about a time when someone else’s words hurt them.

Have the class role-play similar incidents and suggest better ways of communicating.

Homework

Have students research countries in which freedom of speech is banned. They should identify the consequences for speaking freely in these countries.

Have students report their findings to the class. Explain that having freedom of speech means that we have the responsibility of choosing our words carefully.

Additional Resources

Obtain copies of the *Reader's Digest* magazine. Have students take the "Word Power" vocabulary quiz, which is included in each issue.

Have students keep a list of words and definitions they'd like to add to their vocabulary. Have them commit to using a new word on their list each day.

CHECK YOUR GRIP

Check whether you agree or disagree with each statement below. Then follow the directions at the bottom of the page to rate how well you understand the power of your words.

	AGREE	DISAGREE
Hearing angry words first thing in the morning can ruin my day.		
Words of praise always make me feel great!		
I know I can upset someone by calling him or her a name.		
Compliments usually embarrass me, but I like them anyway.		
It's sometimes easier to blame someone else than to explain what really happened.		
I hate how it feels when someone puts me down.		
I know it hurts others when I put them down.		
Sometimes I say things that I don't mean.		
It's usually better to say hello than to pretend you don't see someone.		
It's always better to say, "Excuse me," than to say, "Get out of my way."		
I can use words to make someone smile.		
I sometimes find it difficult to say what I mean.		
I can be nice with words.		
I can be mean with words.		
TOTAL		

Add the number of checks in the "Agree" column, and write the total at the bottom. Then match your score with one of the ratings below. Your rating will tell you how well you understand the power of words.

- 11-14 = TOTALLY IN TOUCH
- 7-10 = PRETTY GOOD GRASP OF IT
- 4-6 = BARELY IN TOUCH
- 0-3 = DON'T HAVE A CLUE