

Lesson 4 The Power of Words

Purpose: To illustrate how words can be used to build positive and negative images.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Perceive how labeling can affect attitudes and actions.
- Understand how people with disabilities may feel when faced with forced choices.
- Identify words that carry negative connotations for disability status.

Materials:

- Lesson 4 Activity Questions sheet
- “The Power of Words” Handout

Background (10 minutes):

1. Ask students to think of a time when someone hurt their feelings and why. (Was it something they said? Something they did? Something they didn't do?)
2. Have students take a minute or so to think or write about how name-calling makes people feel.
3. Have students discuss whether what you call someone affects how you treat them. (For example, do you treat someone you call sir or miss with more respect? If someone is labeled “special”, does it change how you treat them?)

Activities (10 minutes):

1. Tell students you will be asking them a series of questions and they will have to sit or stand depending on the option they choose.
2. Explain that if they choose the first option they should sit down, if they choose the second option they should remain standing.
3. Ask students the sequence of questions from the Activity Questions sheet, having them sit or stand according to their choice, allowing them 5 seconds to choose.
<The intent is to have students make quick decisions and not allow time for contemplation>
4. After the activity, explain to students people with disabilities are often forced to make choices where no option is desirable. Many times they have to deal with others who want to make their decisions for them.

Reflection (10 minutes):

Explain to students that the words we use can bring up positive or negative images. The choices they made during the activity were based on their personal image of what those words meant. Have students engage in discussion about the activity.

Sample questions to ask:

7. How did it make you feel to have forced choices?
8. Were some choices hard to make?
9. How did it make you feel to know everyone else knew which option you chose?
10. Did the choices of being called this or that (like geek or dork, smart or strong, crippled or disabled) bring certain images to mind?

Distribute “The Power of Words” Handout. **Be sure to cover the statement at the bottom of the page.**

The Power of Words Activity Questions

Purpose of Activity:

The questions are designed to start off innocuously to get students engaged in the activity, familiarized with the stand and sit options, and make students feel comfortable with making quick decisions. Each question is intended to demonstrate the impact of having forced choices and have students think about how words can bring up different images (both positive and negative).

Would you rather...:

1. Have bad breath or stinky feet?
2. Have a tiny hand on your forehead or little feet that dangle from your chin?
3. Be smart or strong?
4. Be called unique or determined?
5. Be good looking with no friends or unattractive with many friends?
6. Be called a champion or a participant?
7. Never be able to get your driver's license or never go out without a chaperone?
8. Believe in yourself or have someone believe in you?
9. Make your own decisions or have your parents choose everything for you?
10. Win no medals in the Olympics or win 5 gold medals in the Special Olympics?
11. Be called weird for the rest of your life or fly solo around the world?
12. Be blind or eat a cheeseburger?
13. Cut off both your legs or be able to read and write?
14. Be called lazy or smart?
15. Have a Hamburger or a Hotdog

The Power of Words

Positive Words	Negative Words
Winner	Loser
Love	Hate
Pride	Shame
Fair	Unfair
Strength	Weakness
Enable	Disable
Allow	Restrict
Able	Unable
Unique	Handicapped
Choice	Forced
Possible	Impossible
Include	Exclude
Capable	Crippled
Potential	Confined
Support	Condemn
Talent	Deficit
Assist	Impair
Determined	Lazy
Empower	Control
Enduring	Suffering
Engage	Disengage
Accept	Reject
Befriend	Ignore
Embrace	Avoid
Care	Bother
Help	Dependent

Words can make you feel a certain way. The words you use can affect how other people feel and how you act towards them. The positive words on this Worksheet can help you treat others in a more respectful way. YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHOOSE HOW YOU USE WORDS.