

Portrait of the Whole Person

Lesson 1: Let's Talk About Disability



Disability Rights
WASHINGTON
Washington's protection and advocacy system

OBJECTIVES

- Students will discuss the importance and value of using respectful language when talking about people with disabilities.
- Students will examine the power of language and labels on identity, learn what language is respectful when talking about disabilities, and review some examples of appropriate language.

TEACHER RESOURCES

- Kathy Snow, DisabilityisNatural, People First Language. Link: <https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html>
- "Should You Use Person-First or Identity-First Language?" by Rachel Kassenbrock, Posted in The Mighty at <https://themighty.com/2015/08/should-you-use-person-first-or-identity-first-language2/>
- "Journalists should learn to carefully traverse a variety of disability terminology" by Beth Haller, NCDJ board member Journalism faculty, Towson University, posted on National Center on Disability and Journalism, at <https://ncdj.org/2016/01/journalists-should-learn-to-carefully-traverse-a-variety-of-disability-terminology/>

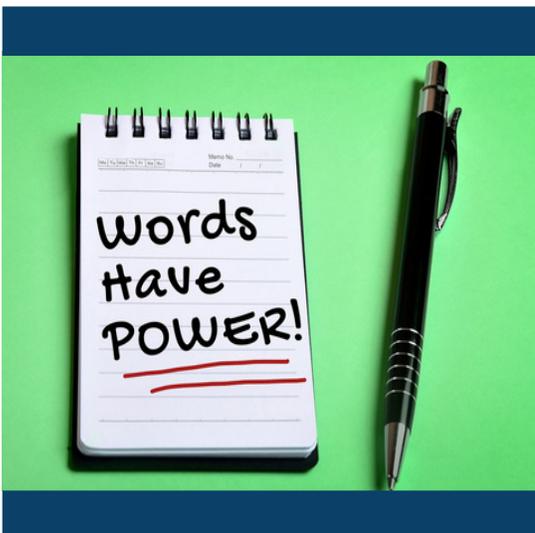
VOCABULARY

- Relevant¹ - adjective
 - having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand
 - having social relevance
- Respect² - noun
 - high or special regard

[1] Merriam-Webster.com. 2017. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (14 March 2017).

[2] Merriam-Webster.com. 2017. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (14 March 2017).

ESTIMATED INSTRUCTION TIME: 20 minutes



WASHINGTON STATE LEARNING STANDARDS AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Disability History Month Act, RCW 28A.230.158, states that “Annually, during the month of October, each public school shall conduct or promote educational activities that provide instruction, awareness, and understanding of disability history and people with disabilities. The activities may include, but not be limited to, school assemblies or guest speaker presentations.” Available at <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.230.158>

Washington State Superintendent DA Policy 3226 Required Observances (includes Disability History Month); Policy 3227, Disability History Month.

Proposed Social Emotional Learning Framework set forth in the report “Addressing Social Emotional Learning in Washington K – 12 Public Schools,” dated October 1, 2016, accessed at <http://www.k12.wa.us/Workgroups/SELB-Meetings/SELBWorkgroup2016Report.pdf>, Standard 4: Individual has the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures:

- Benchmark 4A – Demonstrates awareness of other people’s emotions, perspectives, cultures, language, history, identity, and ability.
- Benchmark 4B – Demonstrates an awareness and respect for one’s similarities and differences with others.
- Benchmark 4C – Demonstrates an understanding of the social norms of individual cultures.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1. Teacher shows SLIDE 1: “Words Matter”** (Slide attached) with only the title showing. Then the teacher leads class discussion:
 - a. Teacher reads the title of the slide. Teacher can ask the students: **Consider what words you would want people to use when describing you?**
 - i. What would you want to be called? If someone calls you kind, smart, athletic, funny – how do you feel about yourself? If someone calls you mean, stupid, slow, clumsy – how do you feel about yourself?
 - ii. If you hear someone else describe someone else as stupid, ugly, slow - how does that make you think about the person calling the names?
 - iii. Then teacher moves through the rest of the slide.
 - b. **Goal of the slide:** Students hear that the words they use can make others feel good or bad. Additionally, if they use unkind words towards others, it affects the way people see them.

- 2. Teacher shows SLIDE 2: “What do you call a person with a disability?”** (Slide attached) only showing the title. Then the teacher leads class discussion:
- a. The teachers asks the class: Think about what you like being called. How do you like to be described?
 - i. The teacher can provide some examples: If you wore glasses, would you want to be known as glasses wearing student or glasses wearing Judy? If you are tall, would you want to be known as the tall one or tall John?
 - ii. Teacher explains that we all have a lot of qualities such as our hair color, athleticism, intelligence, sense of humor, sensitivity, and determination. Most people do not want to be labeled as just one of their qualities.
 1. People with disabilities should be seen as a “Whole Person” with a variety of qualities including the quality of disability or the particular mental or physical condition.
 - iii. The teacher moves through the slide and explains that the best name to call someone with a disability is: a person or their actual name.
 1. The teacher explains that it is best to call people by their name or to call them a person, and talk about their disability when relevant. For example if it is relevant to a story that Judy wears glasses, then include that fact. For example, someone might say: Judy, who wears glasses, did not like seeing 3-D movies because the special glasses did not fit over her regular glasses.
 - b. **Goal of the slide:** Students learn that the best practice is to refer to someone as a person or to call them by their name and that it is appropriate to discuss their disability when relevant to the story.

- 3. Teacher shows SLIDE 3: “What kind of words should a person use when talking about disability?”** (Slide attached). Then the teacher should explain and discuss:
- a. The teacher will use this slide to teach the children about people first language. Identity First is described further in the discussion under SLIDE 4.

TEACHING TIP

People First language has been used for well-over 20 years by various advocacy groups and individuals with disabilities as the preferred means for describing someone who has a disability. The concept underlying people first language is to identify someone as a person first rather than defining the individual by a disability. However, members of the disability community have different opinions regarding the best language to use. Some groups and individuals prefer Identity First language.

- b. The teacher should ask the students to begin by describing people in the lower left and lower right corners. What color hair? What color eyes? What skills does the individual have? Do you know what disability the individual has?
 - i. Outcome: The students should discuss that the image in the left corner shows only the person's disability and no other characteristics. The image on the right corner shows us a male with light eyes and brown/grey hair and we do not know the person's disability.
 - ii. The teacher then can explain that the person in the lower right corner is Itzhak Perlman who is an internationally renowned violinist. He happens to have had polio resulting in him sometimes using a scooter or walker for assistance with mobility. Many people know him, but do not know that he has a disability.
 - iii. The teacher then explains that we want our language to mirror the image in the bottom right corner, letting us see more to a person than just the individual's disability. Of course, it is still appropriate to describe the disability when relevant.
 - iv. The teacher then moves through the rest of the slide explaining that the rule is to call someone a person first: "a person with a disability."
- c. **Goal of the slide:** Students understand that when describing people who have disabilities, we should first see them as a person. One way widely used and acceptable to describe people who have disabilities is People First Language, which means you call someone a person and when relevant a person with a disability.

- 4. Teacher shows should SLIDE 4: "What can I say?"** (Slide attached). Then the teachers should discuss each example.
- a. The teacher should start by explaining that the language we use changes over time. What is acceptable language to use now may not be acceptable in 5 or 10 years. Today, we are learning about People First Language. The teacher should walk the student through each example.
 - b. The teacher should explain that instead of "mentally retarded," we now say a "person with an intellectual disability." This term does not have the negative connotations that "mentally retarded" has.
 - c. Teachers explain to students that that people with disabilities may call themselves different things. While many people use People First language, many others prefer to use Identity First language, stating for example "I am disabled" or "Disabled people often face discrimination" or "I am deaf." Identity First language highlights that the individual is disabled by society and not the condition and also recognizes that the disability is an important aspect of who the person is.

- d. The teacher explains to the students that the best practice is to be respectful and to let people with disabilities identify themselves in their own way. Do not correct them. Recognize that different people and groups may use different language.
- e. **Goal of the SLIDE:** The students learn that it is best to call people by their name and that it is appropriate to reference someone's disability when it is relevant. Students should respect the way the individual with the disability refers to themselves. Students should use People First language if they are referring to a person's disability and do not know how the person refers to themselves.

TEACHING TIP

The teacher should discuss in particular the use of the terms "retard," "retardation," and "retarded." This is an example of the evolution of language from acceptable to offensive. Previously, the term "mental retardation" was a medical term of art, but people used the word "retard" as an insult to describe people as "stupid" or "slow." This word must not be used as it reinforces "painful stereotypes of people with intellectual disabilities being less valued members of humanity," according to the Special Olympics website. The Special Olympics created the "stop the r-word" campaign in 2008. <http://www.r-word.org/positive-changes-from-the-r-word-campaign.aspx>

Even state and federal laws require the use of "intellectual disability." Teacher note: Washington law in RCW 44.04.280 requires all laws to be changed as follows "[r]eplaces disabled, mentally retarded, mentally ill, handicapped, crippled ... with people with intellectual disabilities, ..." Also a federal law signed by President Obama in 2010 called Rosa's Law, Pub. Law 111-256 (S 2781) changes references in federal law from mental retardation to intellectual disability.

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SLIDES

SLIDE 1: "Words Matter"

Words Matter!

- Words can change the way we see someone.
- Words give or take away respect.

SLIDE 2: "What do you call a person with a disability?"

What do you call a person with a disability?

A Person

What makes you different? Hair color, height, athleticism, humor. Do you want to only be known as the girl with brown hair?



SLIDES

SLIDE 3: “What kind of words should a person use when talking about disability?”

What kinds of words should you use when talking about a person’s disability?

The Rule

- See them as a person **FIRST!**



SLIDE 4: “What can I say?”

What can I say?

Say	Don't Say
Person with a disability Person with autism Person who uses a wheelchair Person with an intellectual disability	Disabled Autistic Wheelchair bound Retarded

Not

