



**WE Are
Canada**
LESSON PACKAGE

WORDS WITH MEANING

LESSON PACKAGE FOR GRADES 7 TO 8

THEME: RECONCILIATION | SUBJECT: ENGLISH



Canada

WE Are Canada

WORDS WITH MEANING

WE LEARNING FRAMEWORK SKILLS LEGEND:



ARGUMENT
FORMATION



INFORMATION
LITERACY



LEADERSHIP
SKILLS



ORGANIZATION



ACTION
PLANNING



RESEARCH AND
WRITING



CRITICAL
THINKING



REFLECTION

THEME: Reconciliation

SUBJECT: English

GRADE LEVEL: Grades 7 to 8

LESSON PACKAGE OVERVIEW:

Students will begin their learning with a study of how the use of language affects our understanding of people and events. Students will then investigate the concept of perspective as it relates to storytelling by analyzing Canadian Indigenous short stories. The study is intensified as students analyze the effects of using positive and negative language. Students will explore the implications of using the wrong words at the wrong time in order to create a language guide for individuals to follow as they pledge to become more thoughtful and considerate individuals, both with their words and actions.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

- ▶ How can we use language in a way that helps us to heal and understand each other as we create the path toward reconciliation?

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- Investigate and express ideas noting the importance of word choice and connotation
- Experiment with language, form, techniques and elements
- Create original texts focused on the topic of reconciliation
- Action plan and take action on a current issue to create awareness within local and national communities

WORD BANK

Characters—the people who appear in a story

Conflict—a struggle of opposing forces in a story

Connotation—the positive and/or negative associations a word has beyond its literal meaning

Context—the words and sentences that surround a word or phrase and affect how it's understood

Denotation—the dictionary definition of a word

Descriptive language—language that helps create a detailed image of a person, place or object

Diction—someone's style of speech and language choice

Elements (of the short story)—five features that are common to short stories

Ethical—morally correct or right

Equitable—fair or just

Framing/slant—the personal perspective or point of view in a piece of writing or speech

Impact—a positive or negative effect

Inclusive language—words and expressions that apply to all people, regardless of race, gender, sexuality or disability without prejudice or discrimination

Language—the system of words and meanings people use to communicate

Nicknames—informal names people use to show familiarity with one another

Perspective—the point of view of the person narrating a story

Plot—the events that happen in a story

Semantics—the study of the meaning of words and language

Setting—the physical location in which a story takes place

Theme—the topic or larger idea expressed by a story

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Computer with Internet connection, speakers, projector and screen
- Printed copies of the following short stories (enough that each student will have one short story):
- “Bear Paws”, by Karen McBride: goo.gl/i86RJw
- “The Frog Girl”, by Trevor Jang: goo.gl/u2lfcP
- “Changes”, by Sarina Bouvier: goo.gl/4u4UZ4
- “Incomplete”, by Eliza Christie: goo.gl/p6gDCU

Recommended Assessment for Learning:

You know your students best—their learning styles and preferences, skill levels and knowledge. You are also best positioned to anticipate the habits of mind that will make this lesson package successful.

In this lesson package, teaching strategies include collaborative group work, class discussion, independent reflection and suggestions for demonstration of learning include written reflection, exit tickets and student-generated discussion. Please make any accommodations or modifications that serve your students.

LESSON 1:

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE LANGUAGE



SUGGESTED TIME:

75 minutes

Investigate and Learn

1. Show students the image from the following site:
goo.gl/CFAHFa.
2. Tell students that dihydrogen monoxide is a chemical that is responsible for the deaths of many people, and is often found in poisonous products like bleach. Despite those facts, this chemical is often found in food products and juice boxes given to children.
3. Ask students, now that they have seen this image and they have these facts, will they be more concerned about the amount of dihydrogen monoxide they consume?
4. Then tell them that dihydrogen monoxide is the chemical name for water (H₂O) and that the words you use and the way in which you frame them can have a profound impact on your audience. This is called “connotation.”
5. Ask students how words can be used in positive ways. How would the advertiser of a product want to describe something? How would a movie critic describe a movie they didn't like? What other times might a writer want to choose words to fit a certain tone?
6. Show students the following video about connotation and denotation goo.gl/rrY2nX.
7. Tell students that word choice is very important, because even words that are synonyms can take on different meanings depending on the context. Explain that when writers are choosing a word, they aren't just looking for its direct meaning, but also its indirect meaning.
8. Create a chart on the board with two headings: positive and negative. As a class, come up with a list of words with the same denotations as the following but opposite connotations. Write them on the chart. If they are having trouble thinking of words, refer them to a thesaurus:
 - Bright
 - Cheerful
 - Spacious
 - Smart
 - Clean
9. Next, on the same chart, come up with words with the same denotation but the opposite connotation as the following:
 - Cluttered
 - Shy
 - Boring
 - Brash
 - Brazen
10. Break the class into four groups. Two groups will focus on finding positive descriptions and two groups will use negative descriptions.
11. Ask groups to describe the classroom that they're in, as accurately as they can, using only positive or negative terms. The goal here is not to lie, but to accurately describe things as negatively or positively as they can. Have them try to use as many senses as possible to describe the room.
12. When the students are done, have them share their responses with the class. If the students do well, the room being described should not sound identical at all, despite being the same room.
13. Ask students which room they would rather work in. What about the negative language really set the scene? What about the positive language?
14. Ask: Was it easier for you personally to come up with positive or negative examples? Were some people better at coming up with negative examples, and some better at positive examples? Why do you think one might be easier than the other? Lead students in a discussion around this. Lead them to understand that personal experiences will often shift the way in which we use language, whether it's through things that have happened in our lives or the kinds of media we consume.
15. **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING:** Now that the students have an understanding of positive and negative language, have the students describe one room of their choosing in their house twice, once using positive terms and the second time using negative ones. Each description should be one paragraph long. Like with the classroom, the goal is to be as accurate as possible in their descriptions, but to change the tone of the piece using descriptive language.
16. After the descriptions, have students briefly reflect on the process:
 - How did you enjoy the process of writing from both perspectives?
 - Was it easier to write positively or negatively?

LESSON 2:

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE THROUGH STORIES



SUGGESTED TIME:

75 minutes

1. Remind students that in the previous lessons they looked at the power of language. The words we use to describe a place or a person can have a profound impact on how we view that place or person, or even on how that person views him or herself. In this lesson, students will examine the power words have in telling a story and how short stories are constructed.
2. Ask students: What elements do we expect to see in a story? Are there parts that are universal to all stories? Generate discussion and ask students to offer their responses.
3. Tell students that while there are many elements that stories have in common, there are five to focus on: plot, conflict, character, setting and theme. Show students the following video about the five elements of a short story: goo.gl/KdKIMO. Explain to students that all of these elements are important. They determine how effective the story is and will show the style of the author.
4. Explain that theme is important and is often linked to the culture of a writer. The types of stories someone from the United States would write, for instance, might be focused on elements closely connected to their history, with an emphasis on individual liberties, the power of rebellion and the cultural "melting pot." A Canadian writer, on the other hand, might tell stories connected to Canadian history, with an emphasis on cooperation, the land and the cultural "mosaic." This is because writers often tell stories that reflect the realities in which they grew up.
5. Divide the class into five groups. Assign each group a different element of the short story: plot, character, conflict, theme and setting. Show students the following Ojibway short story about the creation of the world: youtu.be/cX4GJTtSigY.
6. Assign each group one of the following four stories: *Bear Paws*, *The Frog Girl*, *Changes*, *Incomplete*. As they read, ask them to look for and record the common elements in a story:
 - Who or what is the main character?
 - What is the setting?
 - What is the kind of conflict? (Person versus person? Person versus nature? Person versus self?)
 - What is the plot?
 - What is the theme?
 - What words did the author use to affect the mood of the story?
7. After the students are done reading the story, have them compare notes with their group members.

8.

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING: Ask students what we can learn about a culture by reading stories from that culture. What can the themes expressed in the stories of a culture tell us about that culture? Discuss with the class and ask students to share their answers.

9.

Divide the class into new groups made up of students who read different stories. Tell students that the four stories were all award-winning pieces written by young Indigenous Canadians, ranging in age from 16 to 25.

10.

Ask the students to compare notes. What were the stories about? Did the stories have any common themes or concepts? How were the stories different? What did you learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit People from reading these stories? Ask students to discuss their answers to these questions and share them with the class.

11.

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING: Ask students to think back to the first lesson about the use of language. In a journal entry, ask students to reflect on the ways language was used in the stories they read and the ways in which language is used to describe Indigenous Peoples in general. What changes will the students make to ensure that the language they use to describe others will always be respectful? What happens as a result of using positive language to describe others? How can they use positive language as a way of creating positive change in the world?

LESSON 3:

WORDS THAT HURT



SUGGESTED TIME:

75 minutes

1. Explain that nicknames exist because we think we're being funny or endearing. The words we use often have more power than we realize and can change the way the people we're describing view themselves or are viewed by other people.

2. Remind students about the power of language, as discussed in the last lesson. Through that lesson, they were able to use the power of language to shape the way in which they saw their classroom.

3. **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING:** Ask students what happens if we use the power of descriptive language to negatively describe people in the same way that we would negatively describe a physical object? Students will share their answers and experiences with the class. This discussion could very easily get personal and tense. Please tread carefully and watch the reactions of students in the room.

4. Explain that the language we use to describe each other can have a powerful effect. In the same way that describing a classroom changes the way we think about that room, describing a person in a negative way can make that person feel negatively about themselves and others.

5. Explain that the effects of negative nicknames often go unnoticed. Some negative language is even built into our culture. There are professional sports teams that use terms and cheers that draw on stereotypes from Indigenous cultures. In media, Indigenous Peoples are often depicted as having addiction issues, or being involved with gangs. When the media depicts people this way, it can not only change the way other people think of Indigenous Peoples, but it can also change the way Indigenous Peoples feel about themselves.

6. In recent years, there has been a greater effort by most Canadians to find ways to communicate in more inclusive ways that are respectful of diversity. However, many people still find that acceptance is an uphill battle and much more work must be done before Canadians can consider themselves a part of a truly inclusive society.

7. In groups of four or five, have students brainstorm how they would like to be described. What positive language would you use to describe yourself or your friends? What language would hurt you if it was used to describe you? How can we make sure that the language we use to describe someone is not hurtful?

8. Have groups share their responses with the class. Try to lead students to the understanding that it is important to find words that those being described are comfortable with. The only way to do that is to engage in a conversation with them.

LESSON 4:

USING THE RIGHT WORDS, THE RIGHT WAY



SUGGESTED TIME:

75 minutes

1. In the previous three lessons students have learned about the powerful impact of language. Language shapes the way that people see themselves and the world around them and can sometimes change the way people see themselves. Language can work in a subtle way. Words that have a technically correct denotation can have a devastatingly negative connotation. It's because of that power that we need to be very careful about the words we choose to use.
2. Ask students: "Can we hurt someone with our words without meaning to do so?" Explain that language isn't always used to do harm but the effect may be harmful. Often, people who otherwise mean well can use language that ends up hurting others and are unaware of the impacts.
3. Terminology that we use when discussing individual groups is sometimes potentially very hurtful, depending on the connotation and the context in which the words are used.
4. Show the following web page to students: goo.gl/jJmnDj. As a class, carefully discuss the terms listed on the page and the reasons why they might be considered offensive.

EDUCATOR'S NOTE: Be very careful to explain the implications behind the terminology found here and why it might be considered offensive. In particular, examine the "Other general guidelines" near the bottom of the page. Rushing through this particular discussion could have a negative effect.

5. On the board, create a chart with three columns: Avoid, Why, and Instead. Split the class into six groups. In the "Avoid" column, write the six following terms.
 1. Canada's Aboriginal Peoples
 2. Huts, camps
 3. Tribe
 4. Costume
 5. Rituals, rites
 6. Scattered, roaming
6. Assign each of the six groups one of the above terms and have that group consider why the term should be avoided (Why column) and what term with a more positive connotation could be used in its place (Instead column). When completed, have each group fill out the chart on the board with their responses and then discuss them as a class.

Action Plan

7. Ask students: Is there a "golden rule" that could be used to guide people when using language so that they don't accidentally hurt other people? Brainstorm as a class and place workable answers up on the board. Do not erase the

results of the chart created in the brainstorm section.

8. Redistribute the class into new groups, made up of at least one member of each of the original six groups. Ask each group to create a poster, asking people to think carefully about the language they use when talking about others. That poster should include the chart that the class has created, as well as a "golden rule" that the group can agree upon. The golden rule should be a rule that people could keep in mind when choosing inclusive language and could guide them in choosing better language.

Take Action

9. When the posters are complete, share them with other classrooms around the school and invite other teachers to put them up on their walls as a guide for their students.

LESSON 5:

USING LANGUAGE FOR GOOD



SUGGESTED TIME:

75 minutes

1. Now that students have taken action, take it a step further and invite your entire school to celebrate inclusive language.
 - Invite members of your school to share their messages of inclusive language.
 - Designate one wall in the school to collect people's responses to the posters or their messages about inclusive language. Take photos of the responses.
 - Encourage students to challenge errors found in textbooks, literature and the media regarding the misuse of phrases and ideas.
 - Invite interested students to each reflect on the project and produce a version of their work that can be printed.
2. After the posters have been up for about a week, ask the class to reflect on what effect the posters have had on the school community. Provide students with the following questions:
 - How have people reacted to the posters?
 - Do you notice any changes in the way people think about the language they use?
 - Have you changed the way you use language?
 - How can language be used as a force for good in peoples' lives?
3. Document the success of the event by sharing your accomplishments with others (e.g., through your school's newsletter, social media or with another class).
4. Challenge those you shared with to learn about and take action on an issue that will help raise awareness about reconciliation efforts. Challenge them to try one or both of the following to further commit to being a part of moving toward reconciliation:
 - Take the WE Are Canada Pledge. If interested, visit WE.ca for more information and to take the pledge.
 - Start the WE Stand Together campaign. Incorporate the sharing of statistics related to reconciliation on social media, in the school newsletter and in school announcements.
6. Record the goals on the front board and ask students to reflect through a written, verbal or visual response. Within the reflection, students should link the evidence collected in the Take Action section and directly align this to the measurable goal. Does this evidence demonstrate success?
7. Ask students to reflect further to understand the deeper impact of the Take Action section and to consider how they can ensure their efforts have lasting impacts:
 - How will we ensure that our efforts will continue into next year?
 - How can we check that our efforts to use language to heal and create inclusive communities has changed our actions that show respect for others?
 - How will we continue to seek feedback from others about ways we can show respect through language toward all community members, regardless of cultural backgrounds?
 - How does the use and promotion of positive language build inclusiveness within a community?
8. Through the local action implemented by students and the process of reflection, students should understand the importance of kindness and the impact of words.
9. Ask students to consider if their efforts connected to these lessons are just applicable to their community. Is the use and misuse of language when referring to First Nations, Métis and Inuit People a local issue or could it extend to other communities in Canada and around the world?
10. Encourage students to think about how as an individual they are able to make their school community kinder and inclusive for all people.
11. Ask students: As Canadians and citizens of the world, how can you share these lessons with others globally, now and in the future?

Report and Celebrate

REFLECT:

5. As a class, reflect on the learnings and experiences from the Action Plan and Take Action sections. Think about the measurable goals that were set for the Take Action section and, using the evidence collected, reflect on how well these goals were achieved through the action.