



Lesson Time: 20–30 minutes

Responding to Gossip

Objectives & Outcomes

Lesson Objectives: Students will participate in a demonstration of the irretrievable nature of gossip and write a story about a student affected by gossip.

Lesson Outcomes: *Students will be able to...*

- recognize that spoken words cannot be taken back.
- describe a course of action for responding to gossip.

Subject Area Connection: Language Arts

Background

During the middle and high school years, gossip is often an integral part of students' social network. Students may view gossip as a necessary evil or a pleasurable pastime. By recognizing that words spoken about someone can have an equal or greater impact than words spoken to someone, students will be reminded to choose the words they pass on with care and foresight.

This lesson will demonstrate that words, whether spoken or communicated in written form, cannot be erased. Students will recognize that they can only control their own words as they are delivered and have no control afterwards over how the words change or who hears them. Students will gain insight and be motivated to monitor their words in the future.

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Getting Ready

Teacher Preparation: To prepare for this lesson, place a desk or table at the front of your classroom in clear view of all students.

Materials Required:

- pencils
- paper
- stopwatch
- shaving cream
- hand wipes

Introduction and Modeling

Invite one student to the desk you placed at the front of the room. Give the student the can of shaving cream. Display your stopwatch and explain that the student has one minute to write the word *gossip* on the desk with the shaving cream. Time the student as he or she works. The word should be written in well under one minute. Announce the time it took and congratulate the student.

Next tell the student that he or she has one minute to put the shaving cream back in the can. The student will not be able to do this in any amount of time.

Key Vocabulary

gossip: an unconfirmed story.

honesty: telling the truth.

fairness: treating everyone equally and appropriately.

Procedure

1. After one minute has passed, invite another student to the front and ask him or her to write *thief* in the shaving cream using a finger. Continue the demonstration by having other students write words in the shaving cream (*cheater, loser, stupid, ugly, etc.*) Pass out hand wipes as needed before allowing students to return to their seats.
2. Ask students to describe what happened in the demonstration. Guide students to see that words (gossip) cannot be taken back once they have been spoken or written. Words may also be changed by the people who hear or read them. Even gossip that seems harmless may be transformed as it passes from person to person.
3. Ask students to think about the words that were written in the shaving cream (*thief, cheater, loser, stupid, and ugly*). How would the students feel about having any of those words applied to them either to their faces or behind their backs in the gossip mill?
4. Ask students to share any experiences they've had with gossip without using real names. Focus on how the gossip affects each person: the one who starts it, the one spoken about, and the ones who hear it and choose (or not) to pass it on.
5. Ask students to consider how they would feel if they heard that one of their good friends was someone who constantly broke promises. Would they be able to trust that person again even if what they'd heard was just gossip and had no corroborating evidence? What if they heard the same thing about a classmate they don't know well?
6. Pass out paper and pencils.
7. Explain that students will write a short story about a student affected by gossip. Remind students to show how the subject of the gossip and the people around him or her are affected by the gossip.
8. Have students share their stories with the class or in small groups.

Discussion Questions

- How can you evaluate information to determine if it is gossip? (e.g., Is the information true, fair, and respectful? Will it hurt someone's feelings or reputation?)
- What are some ways other than people speaking to each other that gossip can be spread? (e.g., through emails both written and forwarded, through message boards, etc.)
- Is it okay to start gossip to make yourself look better?
- Is gossip ever positive? (No, if information is true and does not hurt anyone, then it is not gossip.)

Evaluation

Students' stories should show the harmful effects of gossip on everyone involved and clearly explain the feelings of the participants. Students should conclude from the lesson that the best way to respond to gossip is not to repeat it.

Tips for Tailoring this Lesson

For Higher Grade Levels

- Ask students to write the same story two or three times, changing the perspective each time. Discuss how the students' stories changed depending on whose point of view was being depicted.
- Students may choose to work in groups to create a short skit about the rapid spread and damaging effects of gossip.

For Lower Grade Levels

- As an alternate demonstration, you may choose to play the game "Telephone" to show how quickly gossip can spread and how much it may change as it passes from person to person.
- As part of the class discussion, generate some ideas for the gossip that will be featured in students' stories.
- Have students work in small groups to write their stories.

Alignment to Standards and Frameworks

Common Core State Standards:

College & Career Readiness

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Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Anchor Standards for Writing

CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Social and Emotional Core Competencies

Social and Emotional Core Competencies: the five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective and behavioral competencies associated with social and emotional learning as identified by CASEL. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning www.casel.org

Self-management

Students are asked to take responsibility for evaluating information before passing it on. Students are asked to describe the negative consequences of spreading gossip.

Social Awareness

Students are asked to participate in a demonstration of the irretrievable nature of gossip. Students are asked to describe the effects of gossip on the feelings of other people.

Relationship Skills

Students are asked to describe a course of action for responding to gossip in the future.