**Lesson: “Word”**

By Angela F. Luna, M.Ed., NBCT

aluna@sanjuan.edu

Suggested Use: Grades 5-12

*(Free and for educational purposes only)*

*All lessons must be age and developmentally appropriate and open communication is encouraged with both parents/guardians and your site administrator. Include appropriate modifications for the group of students you currently serve to meet their needs and developmental level***.** *If students use homophobic language in grades k-4, contact both your site administrator and the parents/guardians of the child to address the issue directly.*

**Rationale:**

A prevailing issue in schools is the use of homophobic slurs and/or language to demean people or things, which begins in the elementary grades and persists in middle and high school. In order to create and sustain a school climate that is both physically and psychologically safe for all students, including LGBTQ students and LGBTQ families, correct and respectful usage of language must be the goal in all publicly funded schools.

Students need direct instruction of the correct denotations of words as well as how to use words such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender correctly to eliminate negative connotations and hostile school environments. School personnel must hold students accountable for the correct usage of such words and proactively curtail abusive language when it occurs. However, preventive approaches to this pervasive problem through lessons, discussions with students, parents/guardians are a proactive and powerful way in which to build a safe environment for LGBTQ people.

**Objective:**

Students will learn the correct origins and denotations of the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and faggot. Students will reflect on their own personal use or experience with homophobic slurs and recognize how the use of such language is a form of discrimination that violates non-discrimination policies and creates an unsafe school environment. Students will practice alternative word choices to express themselves.

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Students, I’ve noticed the use of certain words throughout our school day that are often misused in ways that create an unsafe climate. I’d like for us to examine the correct definitions of certain words and the implications of the negative

1. Luna, 2012

connotations associated with these words. It’s important for us to do this work because we need to ensure that all students and staff feel safe and respected at school.”

**Teacher/Administrator:** “I’d like for you to think for a moment about your experiences when you’ve heard other people use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or faggot.” (give students time to think) Let’s share out as a whole class what we already know about these words.” (discuss & chart student responses)

**K-W-L Chart** (Ogle, 1986)

**K: What we know about these words/What we’ve heard about these words:**

**W: What we should know about the correct meaning and usage of these words:**

**L: What we’ve learned about these words:** (chart this section at the conclusion of the lesson)

**Teacher/Administrator:** “We are now going to do look at the correct origins and meanings of each of these words.”

Show and tell students the correct origins and definitions of each word. Check history and century of origin for each word.

**Gay**

**Lesbian**

**Bisexual**

**Transgender**

**Faggot**

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Does anyone need clarification on any of these correct denotations?” (Give students time to think and respond)

1. Luna, 2012

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Okay, for the next 9 minutes you’re going to quietly journal about your own usage of these words and reflect on the ways in which you’ve used them. Your journal is private, but anyone who wants to share all or part of their thoughts with the class will be allowed to do so, but you will not be allowed to use homophobic language in class. You may simply say whether or not you’ve used language in the past in a way that was harmful to the LGBTQ community.” (Give students time to write and then possibly share)

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Okay students, I’d like for us to chart the denotations, connotations and implications for these words. I’d like all of you to copy the chart in your journal so you can use the information for your own personal reflection, if needed.”

**Word/Usage: Denotation: Connotation: Implication:**

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Students what do you notice about our chart? Do you see any patterns or themes? If so, jot them down in your journal below the chart.”

**Teacher/Administrator:** “Let’ share out what we notice about the information we’ve charted. (give students time to share out patterns/themes)

After an examination of patterns and themes from the class chart, discuss ways in which students can implement more respectful and inclusive language in school. Role-play other ways in which to express themselves, chart alternative uses of language and post the chart in your classroom and hold students accountable for using the correct language.

For example: That’s so….! That’s so uncool! That’s unbearable! That’s outrageous!

That’s maddening! That’s unacceptable! (Joe didn’t chew the furniture because he had an abundance of toys of his own to fulfill his need to chew).

**Respectful & Inclusive Language**

**Examples:** spouse, parent/guardian, students, people, and human

A. Luna, 2012

**Other ways to challenge homophobic language:**

1. Explicitly tell students that the language will not be allowed and describe for them consequence if the expectation is ignored.
2. Communicate your expectations to parents/guardians through a letter and/or phone calls.
3. Follow through with your expectations as needed and in a timely manner.
4. Use the language yourself in correct, respectful, and inclusive ways in front of students. They need to have experiences with the language modeled correctly if we want them to practice the use of the language correctly.
5. Encourage students when they use the words correctly and with respect.
6. Identify adults that students know from the LGBTQ community so the issue of respectful language is humanized. If you’re LGBTQ, share with students how the language personally makes you feel.

A. Luna, 2012