



MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE
A SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER MUSEUM

Teacher's Guide



Ain't you got a Right exhibit on the modern civil rights movement at the Museum of Tolerance

WORDS CREATE OUR WORLD

learn from the past engage the present shape the future

LESSON: WORDS CREATE OUR WORLD

RELATED EXHIBIT: TOLERANCENTER™, POWER OF WORDS

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore the power of words--spoken or written, verbal or nonverbal, by both public figures and everyday citizens of the world. While some words convey hope and positivity, others reveal hate and prejudice. Students identify the effect of both positive and negative words in their own lives and in society. Through analysis, composition, and performance of spoken word poetry to address an issue of social justice, students raise their consciousness of self, community and the world.



ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Words and images have a strong influence in shaping our emotions, thoughts and actions.
Words have power. Words have consequences

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does language influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?
How is our understanding of culture and society constructed through and by language?

OBJECTIVES

Identify and analyze how words, figurative language and nonverbal. communication can be used to convey particular ideas, attitudes or opinions.

Use effective communication skills by composing and performing spoken-word poetry addressing an issue of social justice.

Develop empathy and understanding by exploring the issues that divide our society and our lives.

KEY ISSUES / CONCEPTS

freedom of speech, hate speech, prejudice, bias, bigotry, language, declaration, influence, stereotypes, responsibility, self-expression.

For additional definitions related to this lesson see key *Vocabulary and Terms*.

SUBJECT AREA / CONTENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Language Arts, Poetry, Social Studies, Humanities, Journalism, Performing Arts, Civics, Global Issues, Government, Politics, Service Learning

TIME/MATERIALS

1-3 class periods

Quote Cards handout

Get Lit: Somewhere in America Literary Performance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YshUDa10JYY>.

Printouts of poems: Fear by Raymond Carver, Democracy by Langston Hughes, Always There Are the Children by Nikki Giovanni and Equality by Maya Angelou.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION(S)

Explore bilingual newspapers, poetry, and spoken word.

Make use of imagery in addition to language.

Students perform an already existing piece of poetry.

RESOURCES/LINKS

What's in a Word?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jon-foreman/whats-in-a-word_b_423969.html

POETRY:

Fear by Raymond Carver

<http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/carver/11774>

Democracy by Langston Hughes

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/democracy/>

Always There Are the Children by Nikki Giovanni

<http://ronstidbits.blogspot.com/2010/02/mouse-medicine-poetry-slam-children.html>

Equality by Maya Angelou

<http://www.ctadams.com/mayaangelou6.html>

SPOKEN WORD

Suli Breaks: Why I Hate School But Love Education

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_ZmM7zPLyI

Taylor Mali: What Teachers Make

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xuFnP5N2uA>

Clint Smith: The Danger of Silence

http://www.ted.com/talks/clint_smith_the_danger_of_silence?language=en

Shannon Leigh: Sudanese Children on Def Jam Poetry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdNo7Hk5oR4>

PROCESS

STEP 1

Distribute one quote card to each student. Student reads his/her card to self. Forming pairs, each person reads the quote on his/her card to the other person. Keep rotating to other classmates repeating the exercise until chime is sounded. Partners may exchange cards. It is not mandatory to do so, it is an option.

Debrief and reflect the activity by asking the following:

Did anyone hear a quote they especially liked? Read it aloud.

Did anyone memorize one of the quotes during the activity?

What did the quotes make you think of, and how did they make you feel?

Why do you think quotations are remembered and passed down over the years and even decades or longer?

STEP 2

Students brainstorm, in journals or small groups, about the ways in which we use language. Get them thinking by asking: When, why and how do we use words? Share and discuss as a class.

Teacher asks students to complete the sentence "Words can _____." Follow up with, "What else do words do?" multiple times to encourage students to think beyond the obvious. List all ideas on the board.

Example:

Words...

intimidate	can be destructive
terrify	express hate
hurt	insult
threaten	captivate
have consequences	control
have power	anger
inspire	put down
incite	make us laugh
comfort	bring joy
praise	wound
excite	uplift

STEP 3

Reference the following quote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Ask where does this come from? (The Declaration of Independence) Define **declaration**.

DECLARATION: a formal or explicit statement or announcement; the formal announcement of the beginning of a state or condition.

Offer that when an individual declares something in language and words, it becomes possible/real. When a community declares something, it becomes so. There is agreement. A declaration is a speech act which brings into existence something that didn't exist prior to being spoken.

STEP 4

Ask who is familiar with spoken word poetry? Show students *Get Lit: Somewhere in America Literary Performance* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YshUDa10JYY>.

Debrief video with students by asking:

How does the power of the written word differ from that of the spoken word?

How does our ability to use language empower us?

In what ways do we use words?

In addition, or as an alternative, explore the three poems under “Resources / Links.”

- What is/are the poem(s) about?
- What specific words or phrases in the poem stuck out for you?
- What’s happening in the poem?
- Did you notice any techniques such as rhythm, repetition or irony?

Provide a short background on spoken word poetry:

Spoken word poetry combines literary, theatrical, cultural, and political elements of the beat, black arts, and hip hop movements. It has roots in the West African griot tradition. The piece can be seen as an advocacy tool, allowing people perceived without a voice to be heard.

Written with the intent to be performed, spoken word poetry tends to have a political message. Spoken word centers on the author and his/her identity (artistic, racial, gender, sexual, etc.) Spoken word has the power to move people, introduce new ideas, and impact change. It is a medium that relies on imagery, accessible language and performance.

Discuss how spoken word artists, writers, rap artists, teachers, and students play the role of storytellers in society today. Tell the students that they will become spoken word artists by observing and writing about their experiences.

STEP 5

Begin by researching a number of spoken word performances. Use the examples included under “Resources / Links” as well as ones students may identify on their own. Analyze the artists’ use of language, rhythm, intonation, facial expression, and movement.

STEP 6

Brainstorm ideas and concepts related to social justice.

Examples:

diversity	hate
inequality	hope
education	self expression
tolerance	legacy
rights	oppression
identity	feminism
stereotypes	justice
intolerance	

Students, individually or in pairs, identify one idea or concept that they feel is relevant in their lives, and create their own spoken word piece or written poem.

As students write, tell them not to prejudge their ideas. Write from honest observations, experiences and thoughts. The point is to get something on paper, then to edit and refine later. Thoughts do not have to be written in any particular order or format; random lines can be organized during the editing stage.

Use of informal language and free verse can be encouraged for effect. Rules of grammar are not mandatory, as long as the message is clear.

STEPS:

- Ideate**
- Write**
- Edit**
- Rewrite**
- Read out loud**
- Record self, listen to it**
- Make changes**

The Poem or Piece should connect to the idea or concept in some way, but does not have to be literal. Review some of the ideas students brainstormed at the beginning and encourage them to think in terms of changing or addressing social issues.

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STEP 7: The class will collectively put their pieces together to create an anthology that will represent the voice of their generation.

STEP 8: Students will present their pieces during a class, school or community Poetry Slam.

REFLECTION

Students write a short introduction to their piece in the anthology explaining their process and experience of composing their poem.

Students include a graphic representation of the issue they chose to accompany their poem.

DISCUSSION / WRAP UP

How does the creation and performance of spoken word poetry raise consciousness of self and society?

Do you think spoken word can offer an outlet for voices/cultures that are not usually represented?

How can words promote social justice inside and outside the classroom?

ASSESSMENT

Each student produces or chooses a spoken word piece that includes vivid, descriptive language.

Vocabulary and language, spoken or written, is relevant, appropriate and creative.

Develop a rubric to assess the spoken word poetry. Include categories like content, creativity, delivery and presentation. This can be created with the students.

Students listen and speak to each other respectfully and clearly.

As a homework assignment, students identify examples of the power of words in different newspapers, magazines, brochures, poetry, film or music. Circle or highlight the words that express bias or persuasion, manipulate, instigate, or reinforce stereotypes.

CONNECTING LEARNING AND THE COMMUNITY - EXTENSION EXPERIENCES

Students draw quote art inspired by quotations they select or compose on their own. Collectively they brainstorm where their art would make a difference (e.g. senior center, school hallways, local hospital).

Students contact local organizations and propose a partnership to display their artwork to help spread a positive message.

Invite a local reporter/journalist to speak to your class. Students prepare for the visit by researching and reading the reporter's articles and writing interview questions related to bias, persuasion and responsibility of a journalist.

Have a witness to history, victim, survivor or perpetrator visit your classroom in person or video chat. Have students listen to and interact with the power of storytelling and dispel stereotypes.

Students listen to and watch historical speeches, news reports and commercials. They also identify music and film to understand how culture and society is constructed through and by language.

Create a dictionary dedicated to the power of words. Include entries like anti-bias, derogatory, first amendment, hate speech, influence, journalism, nonverbal communication, persuasion and responsibility.

Produce an original version of the Power of Words video in the Museum of Tolerance. Students identify powerful examples of historical speeches, hate language, inspirational messages, nonverbal communication and imagery. Share your video for possible display on the Museum's website or social media.

Create an ABC book that demonstrates all the ways that words can be used (e.g. H = hurt, I = Inspire). Include a graphic representation. Share the book with younger students.

<p>Do you know what we call opinion in the absence of evidence? We call it prejudice.</p> <p>- Michael Crichton, author</p>	<p>Love is granting another the space to be the way they are and the way they are not.</p> <p>– Werner Erhard</p>
<p>What a sad era when it is easier to smash an atom than a prejudice.</p> <p>- Albert Einstein</p>	<p>A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.</p> <p>– Chinese Proverb</p>
<p>It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.</p> <p>– E.E. Cummings</p>	<p>I haven't failed. I've found 10,000 ways that don't work.</p> <p>- Thomas Edison, inventor</p>
<p>What's right isn't always popular. What's popular isn't always right.</p> <p>- Howard Cosell</p>	<p>Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.</p> <p>- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.</p>
<p>What great thing would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?</p> <p>– Robert H. Schuller</p>	<p>Talk doesn't cook rice.</p> <p>- Chinese proverb</p>

<p>...racist thought and action says far more about the person they come from than the person they are directed at.</p> <p>- Chris Crutcher, author</p>	<p>Don't ever let a soul in the world tell you that you can't be exactly who you are.</p> <p>- Lady Gaga</p>
<p>Silence is golden when you can't think of a good answer.</p> <p>- Muhammad Ali</p>	<p>Just because you haven't found your talent yet, that doesn't mean you don't have one.</p> <p>- Kermit the Frog</p>
<p>Don't find fault, find a remedy.</p> <p>- Henry Ford</p>	<p>A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.</p> <p>- Lao-Tzu</p>
<p>I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.</p> <p>- Maya Angelou</p>	<p>A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.</p> <p>- Benjamin Franklin</p>
<p>Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it.</p> <p>- Albus Dumbledore, Harry Potter</p>	<p>No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.</p> <p>- Eleanor Roosevelt</p>

Circumstances determine our lives. But we shape our lives by what we make of our circumstances.

- John Wheeler Bennett, Historian

Vulnerability is our most accurate measurement of courage.

- Brene Brown

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all of my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.

-Anne Frank

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.

- Anais Nin

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