



WORDS THAT HURT AND WORDS THAT HEAL

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: K – 3

LENGTH OF TIME: 45 minutes

GOALS

- For students to consider the importance of words and actions.
- For students to see themselves as allies standing up for each other in a caring community.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will apply literature to real life experiences.
- Students will understand the power of words to lift others up or make others feel “less than” or unwelcome.
- Students will strategize effective ways to welcome and stand up for someone who has been treated unkindly.
- Students will learn about ally behaviors.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. (Also SL.K.2, 2.2, and 3.2)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details. (Also RL.K.3, 2.3 and 3.3)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events. (Also RL.K.7, 2.7 and 3.7)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

This lesson illustrates how words or actions can hurt—or heal. After reading the book *One* by Kathryn Otoshi, the teacher will lead students in a discussion of words or actions that have hurt them or other students in their school. Then, students will discuss what they can do to help each other and be there for each other (ally behavior).

If you don't have a copy of the book, there is a video of the author reading her book or an example of elementary school students reading.

It is important to caution students not to use people's names or identify anyone when sharing. The intent is to ensure that students change hurtful practices without bringing attention to individual students have been the target of bullying behavior.

Special thought and care will need to be taken if certain students are vulnerable due to differences or recent incidences, in order to avoid unwanted attention or discomfort for that student. Following up with some students after the activity, in a discreet manner, may be necessary as well.

As the lesson proceeds, try to ensure that the different kinds of name-calling you have heard in your school are mentioned. If you have heard students at your grade level using “gay” as a put-down, raise that as a discussion topic, as students may think it is taboo to mention. If you have heard teasing about gender identity, gender expression, economic differences, religion, home language, race or ethnicity, ensure those are brought up.

This lesson is featured in the Welcoming Schools film [What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, & Bystanders](#) (streaming online).

MATERIALS

- A large piece of paper cut into the shape of a heart
- *One* by Kathryn Otoshi (If you don’t have a copy, you can use the video)
- [Kathryn Otoshi reading *One*](#) or [One read by elementary students](#) (optional)

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Listen to and monitor ways that students or others in the school put each other down or exclude each other. Listen for put-downs related to gender identity, gender expression, religion, home language, race, ethnicity, class, family structure, disability or personal appearance. Notice who gets excluded and why.
- You may want to look at behavior data for your school to track any patterns.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON TO YOUR CLASS

Gather students in a group and say, “Today, we are going to talk about and explore how we treat each other in our classroom community and school—what makes us feel welcome, happy and included, as well as behaviors that can make us feel lonely, sad and excluded.” Explain that students can feel excluded because they are in a situation where groups of students have already formed bonds of friendship or because they feel different in some way. Point out that some people might automatically put up barriers to another student, deciding quickly that they dislike the student, without even trying to get to know them. State, “In our class and school, we want everyone to be treated kindly, included and free to learn and make friends.”

LESSON INCLUDING READING THE BOOK, *ONE* BY KATHRYN OTOSHI

Before you begin reading:

- Ask your students to pay attention to the colors that are in the book and what the colors mean. Also, ask them to think about the word “count.” “Count” refers to two different things in the story—something that matters and numbers.

As you read:

- Pause to ask the students questions and reflect on the book.
 - After Red says, “Red is hot. Blue is not,” you could ask, “How do you think Blue feels?”
 - After Red picks on all of the colors and gets bigger and BIGGER, you could ask your students, “If you were one of these colors, how would you feel at this point?”

CRUMPLED HEART ACTIVITY

After reading the book:

- Ask your students if they have ever noticed in your school or classroom, people acting like Red or people feeling sad or excluded because of things that were said that might have hurt their feelings.
- Ask them to take a minute to think about these things.
- Say that you have a heart that you are going to crumple up a bit each time someone says one of these things that hurt. The heart represents students' hearts and when something is said to us that feels unkind, it makes our heart hurt.
- To start things off, ask again: "Have you heard anybody say unkind things or do mean things in our classroom or our school?" (Remind students not to name anyone specifically).
- Interact with students as they bring things up. Ask them follow-up questions for clarification or to see how it felt to either hear the unkind words directed at them or at someone else. Appreciate them if they have said something that may have been difficult.
- Are there any words that they have heard other students say that are hurtful?
- Each time another student says something that they've seen or heard that is hurtful, crumple part of the heart.
- After students have had a chance to say a number of things about what has been or could be hurtful and after you have had a chance to interact with students on these experiences, turn to what could make things better.
- Ask your students:
 - What are some things that you could do to help when you have heard or seen something unkind?
 - How could you make someone feel more welcomed and included again?
 - How would you help stop the hurtful teasing or bullying? (Answers might include: talking with or befriending the targeted student, confiding in an adult, talking with the student who is being mean, causing a distraction to help stop the harassment or speaking up in the moment and saying, "STOP.")
- Say that each time someone comes up with an idea, you will smooth out the heart a little while they are talking.
- Ask, "If somebody was being mean to you and making you feel excluded, what would you hope someone would do?"

Optional: Short activity with students:

- After students have had a chance to name ways that they could help a person who is being teased or bullied, have them think about the end of the book.

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- Ask, “Who was it that stood up to Red? What did One do to let Red know that picking on the other colors was not OK behavior?” (Answer: He stood up straight and tall like an arrow. If students don’t come up with that answer, prompt them or turn back to that page in the book to remind them.)
 - Ask, “What number do you think you would be in the book?” (Someone will probably say the One.)
 - Ask, “Who else would want to be One? Raise your hand. Who would want to be number two? How about number three or four?”
 - If they raised their hand, have them stand up.
 - Say, “Look at all the people standing up. If all of these people stood straight up like an arrow and said, No,” (have kids say, ‘No’), do you think it would help stop someone from getting teased or hurt?”
 - Ask, “How do you think it would feel to see people standing up for you if you were the one being teased or hurt?”
 - Ask, “What would you think if you saw someone else standing up for someone?”

Going back to the book:

- After One stood up and said, “This is not OK,” and the other colors did the same, did you notice how that word “count” was used? The book says, “Blue saw the colors change. He wanted to count.” What does Blue mean? Discuss how it feels good to count.
- At the very end of the book, Red blew a fuse and then got smaller and smaller and smaller. Did Red disappear? Did you notice what happened to Red at the end? He turned another color, right? And then it says, “Then Red laughed and joined the fun.” What do you think about that ending? Were the colors just standing up to Red and saying, “Stop it. Go away. We don’t want to see you ever again,” or were the other colors saying, “Hey, you stop. You don’t have to use mean behavior. We know you can change and be kind”? People can change their behaviors.

Going back to the heart:

- Ask, “Why did I crumple up the heart? Why did I smooth it out? What do you notice about the heart? Does it look the same as when I started? How is it different?”
- Explain that this is the same as when somebody is bullied. If someone is bullied and told they’re not important, *even if* someone says, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do that,” the person’s heart can never be the same.
- Discuss how this is true for anyone who is targeted—called names or bullied for being different. That’s why it is important to not be mean to other people and to be a kind and welcoming person.

EXTENSIONS

- As you read books throughout the year, use the heart as a visual cue in the book if a character is showing bullying behavior or if a character is being an ally.
- Post the heart on a wall as a reminder of the power that words can have to hurt and heal. The heart will serve as constant reinforcement of a vivid lesson in kindness.
- Encourage students to practice kind words and actions and record on the classroom heart.
- Include words like ally, bystander and upstander on a word wall.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Work with your students to create a list of guidelines for making the classroom feel safe and affirming for everyone. Ask them to say what they think the goals should be in order to be a welcoming community where everyone feels safe and included. Ask them to think of ways they can all participate in making these guidelines work and create strategies for intervening, requesting the assistance of an adult or joining with others to make someone feel better, safer and more welcome. Educators will monitor and encourage engagement, empathy and compassion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

- [Children's Books to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying](#)
- [Lesson Plans to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying in School](#)
- [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying – School Resources](#)
- [Booklist: Sticking Up For Each Other: The Power of Allies](#)
- [Welcoming Schools Professional Development Trainings](#)