

The Power of Words

Essential Question

What should you do when someone uses mean or scary language on the Internet?

Lesson Overview

Students consider that while they are enjoying their favorite websites they may encounter messages from other kids that can make them feel angry, hurt, sad, or fearful. They explore ways to handle cyberbullying and how to respond in the face of upsetting language online.

Students discuss all the ways they use technology for communication, put themselves in the shoes of children who are cyberbullied on a kids' game website, and explore both the similarities and differences between in-person versus online communication. Students then brainstorm ways to respond to cyberbullying.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- empathize with those who have received mean and hurtful messages.
- judge what it means to cross the line from harmless to harmful communication online.
- generate solutions for dealing with cyberbullying.

Materials and Preparation

-  Preview the video “**The Power of Words**,” and prepare to show it to students.
- Copy the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**, one for every four students.
- Copy the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Colored pencils
- String (cut string the length of the classroom)

Family Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Family Tip Sheet (Elementary School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grade 3: RI.1, RI.3, RI.4, RI.10, RF.4a, W.4, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.4, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

grade 4: RL.3, RL.10, RI.1, RI.3, RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, RF.4a, W.9b, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.5, L.3a, L.6

grade 5: RL.3, RL.10, RI.1, RI.3, RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, RF.4a, W.9b, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.5, SL.6, L.6

NETS·S: 2b, 5a, 5d

Key Vocabulary –

cyberbully (verb): using technology tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

DRAW a series of expressive faces, or emojis, on the board:



INVITE students to suggest emotions that match each face's expression. Answers will vary.

| Faces | Responses will vary |
|-------|--|
| | happy, glad, excited, content, thrilled, pleased |
| | mad, angry, frustrated, grouchy, furious, upset |
| | bored, calm, relaxed, lonely, disinterested (note: this face may evoke opposing emotions as it is pretty neutral) |
| | sad, unhappy, upset, depressed, miserable |
| | surprised, scared, shocked, amazed |

TELL students that not everyone will react to a particular situation the same way, but just because a reaction is different from our own, that doesn't mean we should discount others' feelings.

EXPLAIN to students they are going to watch a video about how words, whether typed or spoken, can impact how someone else feels.

▶ SHOW students “The Power of Words.”

ASK:

- Who has heard of the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”?

Responses will vary.

- What did Guts mean in his text that sometimes words can hurt?

Despite the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” words are powerful. Sometimes it is hard to ignore what someone is saying when it’s a mean name. Names CAN make you feel sad or hurt.

REMIND students to keep Legs’s question in the back of their minds during this lesson: *How do you treat others online?*

teach 1

What's the Problem? (15 minutes)

ORGANIZE students into groups of four, and have each group pick a person to record their ideas.

DISTRIBUTE the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**. Have the groups of students read the scenario about Rani and Aruna receiving mean messages through a children's game website.

HAVE each group answer the questions, and then have them share their responses with the class. Look for responses that show empathy for Rani and Aruna and acknowledge that the messages are mean and hurtful and should be stopped. Ask students to read the Use Common Sense! section on the **Words Can Hurt Student Handout**.

INVITE students to share their own stories.

ASK:

Have you seen mean messages sent to you or others online? Tell us about it, but do not use real names.

Answers will vary.

DIVIDE students into pairs.

INVITE one partner to write the phrase "You're weird" on a piece of paper, and then hand it to their partner. Tell them that they just received this text.

ASK:

What are the reasons the person might have texted "You're weird"?

They're continuing an inside joke; the first person did something silly at an earlier time; a group of kids is teasing the kid; the person who sent the text really does think the person is weird but is afraid to say it to his or her face.

How did the partner feel who was called weird?

Possibly like the other person was kidding around, but maybe that the person was teasing or being hurtful.

TELL one person from each pair to say to the other person, "You're weird," with a smile on his or her face.

ASK:

Why might you feel differently if you could see the person?

People give non-verbal cues through facial expressions and body language.

teach 2

Crossing the Line (10 minutes)

PLACE the piece of string across the length of the classroom. Ask students to stand on one side of the line. Then ask them to imagine that they are online and somebody has sent them a message, which you will read to them. Tell the students to stay where they are if they think the message is okay; to cross over the line if they think the message is not okay; or to stand on the line if they think the message is in between.

READ each of these messages aloud and have students move accordingly:

- You are an idiot.
- I'm having a party and you're not invited.
- I like your new haircut.
- You are really ugly.
- Thanks for the advice. Next time would you mind telling me in person rather than by texting?
- Did you finish your homework?
- Why is it taking you so long to finish it?
- You are such a freak.

REVIEW with students that kids like to go online and use cell phones to email, chat, watch videos, send messages, play games, and do homework. But sometimes the language can get mean or scary. Messages that make people feel bad cross the line. Sometimes that meanness is unintentional, but when people use tools such as the Internet and cell phones to deliberately upset someone else over and over, that's cyberbullying.

teach 3

Talk and Take Action (10 minutes)

HAVE students return to their seats.

DISCUSS how easy it is to feel angry or upset when somebody sends you a mean or scary message online.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **cyberbullying**. Explain that cyberbullies deliberately try to make you feel that way, just like real-life bullies. Discuss the following ideas about what they can do when faced with cyberbullying:

- Cooling down can be a good first step when you receive a mean message online. Taking a deep breath, counting backwards from 10, or pausing to think about what you will do next can give you time to think of the BEST way to handle the situation.
- Finding help or telling a trusted adult or a friend can be a good way to take action. You shouldn't deal with the cyberbullying situation alone. The person you tell should be someone who wants to hear what you have to say, and will help you work on a solution. Adults can be especially good because they often have the power to influence the situation, or can give you advice about what to do.
- Ignoring the person who is cyberbullying you can be very effective. Those who bully often like attention.
- Whatever you do, remember to keep a copy of your communication with the individual who is cyberbullying you. If you delete the communication, there is no proof of how the bully treated you if you need to show it to a trusted adult.

DISTRIBUTE the **Talk and Take Action Student Handout** to each student. Encourage them to depict a cyberbullying scenario and a possible solution. They can use pencils and paper or go online and use the free tool Make Beliefs Comix (www.makebeliefscomix.com) to complete a comic strip.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

Why is it a bad idea to send mean or scary messages online?

Because they can make the person who gets them upset, angry, or scared.

Why might there be more misunderstandings between people when they send online messages as opposed to face-to-face discussion?

Online messages can be more confusing or scarier than face-to-face messages because there are no face-to-face cues to help you understand people's intentions.

What can kids do when they get cyberbullying messages?

They can 1) calm down and take a deep breath, 2) tell a friend or a trusted adult who can help develop a plan to handle the situation, 3) ignore the bully, 4) keep a copy of the communication with the bully.

The Power of Words

Directions

Create a cartoon about a cyberbullying situation. Each frame should show a different part of the situation:

FRAME 1: Make a cartoon about something that a cyberbully might do or write online. Remember to use language appropriate for school.

FRAME 2: Show what you might do if you saw what the cyberbully has done or written.

FRAME 3: What might be a positive outcome, or result, of the situation?

What might a cyberbully say or do?

What would you do in response?

What would a positive outcome be?

Use Common Sense!

- If someone is mean to you online, take a breather and ignore them. Save a copy of your conversation between you and the bully.
- If you, or someone you know, is cyberbullied, talk to a trusted adult – like a parent, family member, or teacher. Together, you can think of a plan for how to respond.

The Power of Words

Directions

Read the story below and then answer the questions that follow.

Rani and Aruna love a website that has games and chatting for kids. Their parents let them play on the site. Lately, though, Rani and Aruna have been receiving mean messages on the site, including:

Group Chat:

- Player A: I hate you!
- Player B: You are ruining the game!
- Player C: You are so stupid.
- Player D: You are a dork.

send

1. How do you think Rani and Aruna feel when they read those messages?

Rani and Aruna feel _____

2. How would you feel if you received messages like these?

I would feel _____

3. Why do you think people send these kinds of message to people they don't know?

People send these kinds of messages because _____

Use Common Sense!

There's an old saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I think that this saying is TRUE/NOT TRUE (circle one) because _____

The Power of Words

1. Alicia receives a text message from her friend Ronald. The message says, “I am having a party. You are not invited.” Circle the word that shows how Alicia might feel after she receives the message.

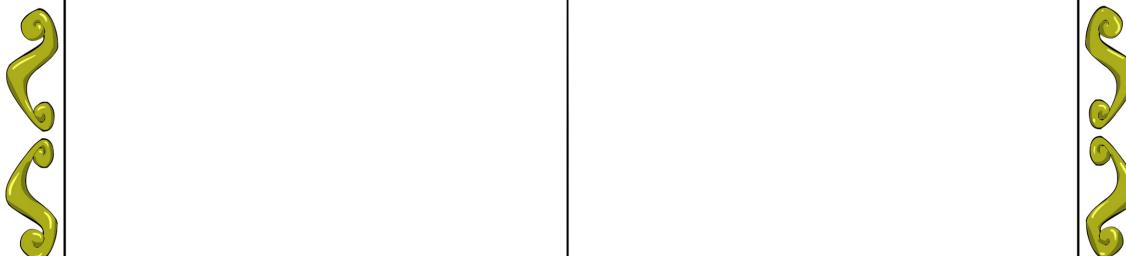
- a) hurt
- b) excited
- c) popular

2. Theo is having fun playing Dragons and Knights online. Then he sees a message from another player. It says, “You’re ruining the game, stupid!” What should Theo do about the message? What shouldn’t he do? Use the chart below to fill in the letters that go with each answer.

- a) Ignore the player who sent the mean message
- b) Write a message back that says, “You’re so stupid, you’re the one ruining the game”
- c) Pretend that he doesn’t feel hurt by the message
- d) Save the message in case the other player sends Theo another mean message
- e) Tell an adult about the message
- f) Never play Dragons and Knights online again



| Things Theo Should Do | Things Theo Should Not Do |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | |



The Power of Words

3. The following acronym, STOP, gives advice on what to do when something goes wrong online. Explain what each letter means.

| STOP | What is the meaning of each phrase? Explain in your own words. |
|------------------------|---|
| Step away | |
| Tell a trusted adult | |
| Okay sites first | |
| Pause and think online | |

The Power of Words

1. Alicia receives a text message from her friend Ronald. The message says, “I am having a party. You are not invited.” Circle the word that shows how Alicia might feel after she receives the message.

- a) hurt
- b) excited
- c) popular

Answer feedback

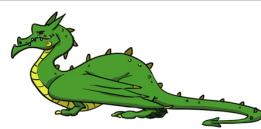
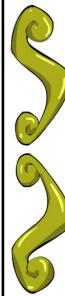
The correct answer is **a**. Alicia probably feels **hurt** by Ronald’s message. Telling someone they aren’t invited can hurt their feelings. Things that are hurtful in person are also hurtful online.

2. Theo is having fun playing Dragons and Knights online. Then he sees a message from another player. It says, “You’re ruining the game, stupid!” What should Theo do about the message? What shouldn’t he do? Use the chart below to fill in the letters that go with each answer.

Answer feedback



| Things Theo Should Do | Things Theo Should Not Do |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ignore the player who sent the mean message d) Save the message in case the other player sends Theo another mean message e) Tell an adult about the message | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) Write a message back that says, “You’re so stupid, you’re the one ruining the game” c) Pretend that he doesn’t feel hurt by the message f) Never play Dragons and Knights online again |



The Power of Words

3. The following acronym, STOP, gives advice on what to do when something goes wrong online. Explain what each letter means.

| STOP | What is the meaning of each phrase? Explain in your own words. |
|------------------------|--|
| Step away | When something goes wrong, you should step away from the device or website and take a break. |
| Tell a trusted adult | If something goes wrong, you should tell a trusted adult so that he or she can help you. |
| Okay sites first | Make sure you are visiting sites that are appropriate for your age. |
| Pause and think online | When you go online, you should pause and think twice before sending, posting, or reacting. |