

LESSON

What's So Bad About "That's So Gay"?

Almost every teacher has heard students use the expression, "that's so gay" as a way of putting down or insulting someone (or to describe something). These lessons will help students examine how inappropriate language can hurt, and will help them think of ways to end this kind of name-calling.

Grade Level 3-5, 6-8

Topic: Gender & Sexual Identity, Bullying & Bias

Subject: Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, SEL, ELL / ESL

Social Justice Domain: Justice

OBJECTIVES

Activities will help students:

- explore how the phrase "that's so gay" is hurtful to students
- begin to understand and express their opinions, verbally and in writing, about how language can be used in bullying
- write letters expressing their viewpoints about bullying in schools

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why do students use language such as "that's so gay"? What is the impact this kind of hurtful language will have on others?
- How can we prevent the use of language such as "that's so gay," used to tease and bully?
- How can we use writing as a means of expressing our opinions about bullying and other important social issues?

MATERIALS

- chart paper
- markers

Professional Development

Read ‘Good Morning Boys and Girls’ to learn more about the power of and sometimes hidden prejudice in language. Also review Exposing Hidden Homophobia for examples on how to deal with hidden homophobia among older students.

For an additional activity and handout on how to discuss controversial issues, check out Controversial Issues and the companion Controversial Topics Handout.

Glossary

bullying | ˈboʊlē ɪŋ |

(*noun*) The act of purposely causing harm to others, through verbal harassment, physical assault or other more subtle forms of meanness.

homophobia | ˌhōməˈfōbēə | (*for older students*)

(*noun*) Fear, dislike or hatred to homosexual (also bisexual or transgender) people.

prejudice | ˈprejədəs |

(*noun*) Negative judgment or opinion, often of a specific group of people, formed without knowledge of the facts and sometimes leading to hatred or suspicion.

Procedures

1. In your journals, spend a few minutes responding to these questions: Have you ever been called a name? How did that name-calling make you feel?
2. On tables or in different places around your classroom will be “graffiti boards”—pieces of chart paper with questions at the top of the paper—displaying the questions below. Go to each board and read the question at the top. Use a marker to write your answer to or thoughts about the question somewhere on the board. If you don’t know an answer to one of the questions, that’s okay. Just write whatever comes to mind.

(Note: Graffiti boards should be prepared in advance; students may circulate freely or, depending on space limitations, move around the classroom in a more structured way.)

Questions for graffiti boards:

- What do you think of when you hear the word “gay”?
- In what ways have you heard the word “gay” used?
- Why do you think people sometimes use the phrase “that’s so gay”?
- How would you feel if someone said “that’s so gay” about something you were doing or about something you liked?
- What would you do if you heard someone say “that’s so gay” or another unacceptable remark?

3. Once everyone has had a chance to examine each of the boards, circulate a second time and read other students’ answers. Make note of anything that stands out to you as surprising or informative.

4. As a class, come together to discuss the questions and the answers you read and wrote. *(Note: Clarify any definitions, and talk about why words like “that’s so gay,” “gay,” “fag,” “sissy” or anything else that came up are inappropriate. Try to think about why these particular words are used, and encourage students to discuss specific examples.)*

5. In your notebook or journal, write a letter based on the discussion you had as a class. You may want to imagine you are writing to a school newspaper, to the principal or to a bully. Write your opinion about name-calling in school, why it happens, and how you and your classmates might be able to put a stop to it.

6. In small groups, share and discuss the letters you wrote.

Class Project

Develop a handbook of rules and guidelines for your school, with the goal of preventing name calling and creating a safer school environment. Your handbook should include specific rules about using appropriate language, such as the use of the phrase “that’s so gay.” You can also be creative with it, incorporating stories, illustrations or even comics to communicate why “that’s so gay” is inappropriate and how it, as well as other types of name-calling, can hurt others.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Information about fighting homophobia in schools, as well as various calls to action, can be found at GLSEN.
- Safe Schools Coalition offers resources for educators and parents on how best to support LGBTQ youth and deal with issues of homophobia in school communities.

- Support and activist information for children from LGBTQ families can be found at COLAGE.

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