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## WORD POWER

**Grades:** 4 and up

**Time:** 15-30 minutes

**Materials:** A list of sentences written on large sheets of paper (see below); markers

**Relevant Subjects:** Social Studies, Language Arts, and, with modifications, Science, History, and Health

**Preparation:** Write up a list of sentences (written large enough for the whole group to see) that include “questionable” word choices – those that assign value (usually negative) to someone or something. (See samples below.)

Sample sentences:

- A. My neighbor’s dog barks all the time. It howls at the moon, growls at passers-by and continually irritates me.
- B. The elderly woman had way too much to keep up with. She owned twelve cats.
- C. Emelyn is a vegan. She has respect for living things, and I admire her.
- D. We went to the park yesterday for a picnic and saw a whole bunch of children running wild.
- E. The breed-specific legislation passed last year in our town meant that all Pit bulls had to be put to sleep.

1. Reveal the list of sentences to the group. Give participants a bit of time to read them silently to themselves. Ask volunteers to read each sentence, with feeling, as if they were the source of the words.

2. Underline the words shown below on the sample sentences (use a contrasting, easily-visible color, such as red):

- A. My neighbor’s dog barks all the time. It howls at the moon, growls at passers-by and continually irritates me.
- B. The elderly woman had way too much to keep up with. She owned twelve cats.
- C. Emelyn is a vegan. She has respect for living things, and I admire her.
- D. We went to the park yesterday for a picnic and saw a large group of children running wild.

E. The breed-specific legislation passed last year in our town meant that all Pit bulls had to be put to sleep.

3. Ask the group: “What do you think of the word choices here? Did I make the right or best word choice? What words would you choose?” Have participants pair up and discuss.

4. Ask pairs to share what they thought about the underlined word choices. Have the group consider:

- What word(s) would they have chosen and why – who had a different choice?
- Is there anything “wrong” with the current word choices? What do those choices imply?

5. Briefly discuss the power of words and how we assign value depending on which word(s) we choose.

6. Invite students to share other words that hold power and whether they assign a positive, negative or neutral value.

### **Alternative:**

The examples in this activity have primarily used animal-focused words and phrases. This activity can be opened up to include the exploration of the power of words related to numerous topics.

### **Activity by Brandi Burke-Hicks (M.Ed. Student)**