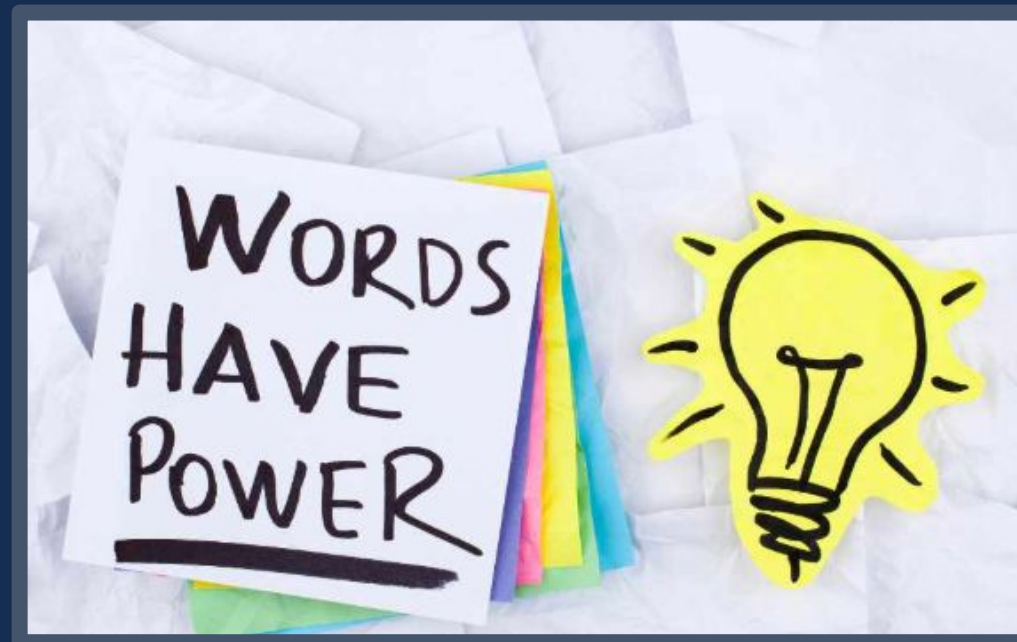


Building Belonging and Addressing Biased Language

Speak Up At School

Family Overview - Coffee with the Principal - 3-13-26



Why This Focus Matters in our Elementary School

“The Heart of What We Do”

- If we are a school that cares, we must ensure that every student feels supported, welcomed, and seen - by our staff and by their peers.
- Our goal is to help students understand the power of words – and how to use that power to build community.
- We’re not just reacting to hurtful language; we’re teaching what it means to belong.
- Please share your thoughts on this prompt:

“When we think about belonging – what does that look and sound like in a TK–5 classroom?”

BACKGROUND OF THE SPEAK UP AT SCHOOL TRAINING FOR SOUTH WHIDBEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. Clifford engaged in our first “Speak up at School” training for all ITK - 12th grade staff at our kick off staff development training in August, just prior to the start of the school year.

SWES, SWMS and SWHS staff have engaged in ongoing (3 at each building for staff) Speak up at School trainings since that initial training, led by our building leadership teams and administrators. Schools are now in the process of bringing this work to our students at developmentally appropriate levels.

The “**Speak Up at School**” training/program was developed by **Learning for Justice**, an education project of the **Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)**. The trainings for staff have included:

- Strategies for responding to **biased or derogatory comments** in classrooms or school settings
- Guidance on **interrupting stereotypes and prejudice**
- Classroom discussion protocols and scenarios
- Activities to help educators practice **real-time responses to incidents of bias**.

Strategies for Speaking Up

1

Interrupt

"I need to stop you there..."

2

Question

"What do you mean by that?"

3

Educate

"That word has a harmful history..."

4

Echo

"I agree with what was just said about..."

Reflection / Discussion

Think of a time when you heard biased language used. This could be your own work, community or school experience. Reflect on these questions - and if you feel moved to do so, please share your experience, but please do not share names / specifics.

Where were you? (classroom, work setting, community, etc..)

- **What was the role of the person using biased language?** (peer, teacher, colleague, student, parent, community member, etc.)
- **Your relationship to this person:** (a peer, colleague, etc... stranger, etc.)
- **Were you able to speak up?**
- **If you were able to speak up,** what strategy did you use or what action did you take?

Words Shape Our Community

- *Elementary students are learning language every day – from peers, adults, media, and home.*
- *Our role is to help them understand which words build community and which words hurt.*

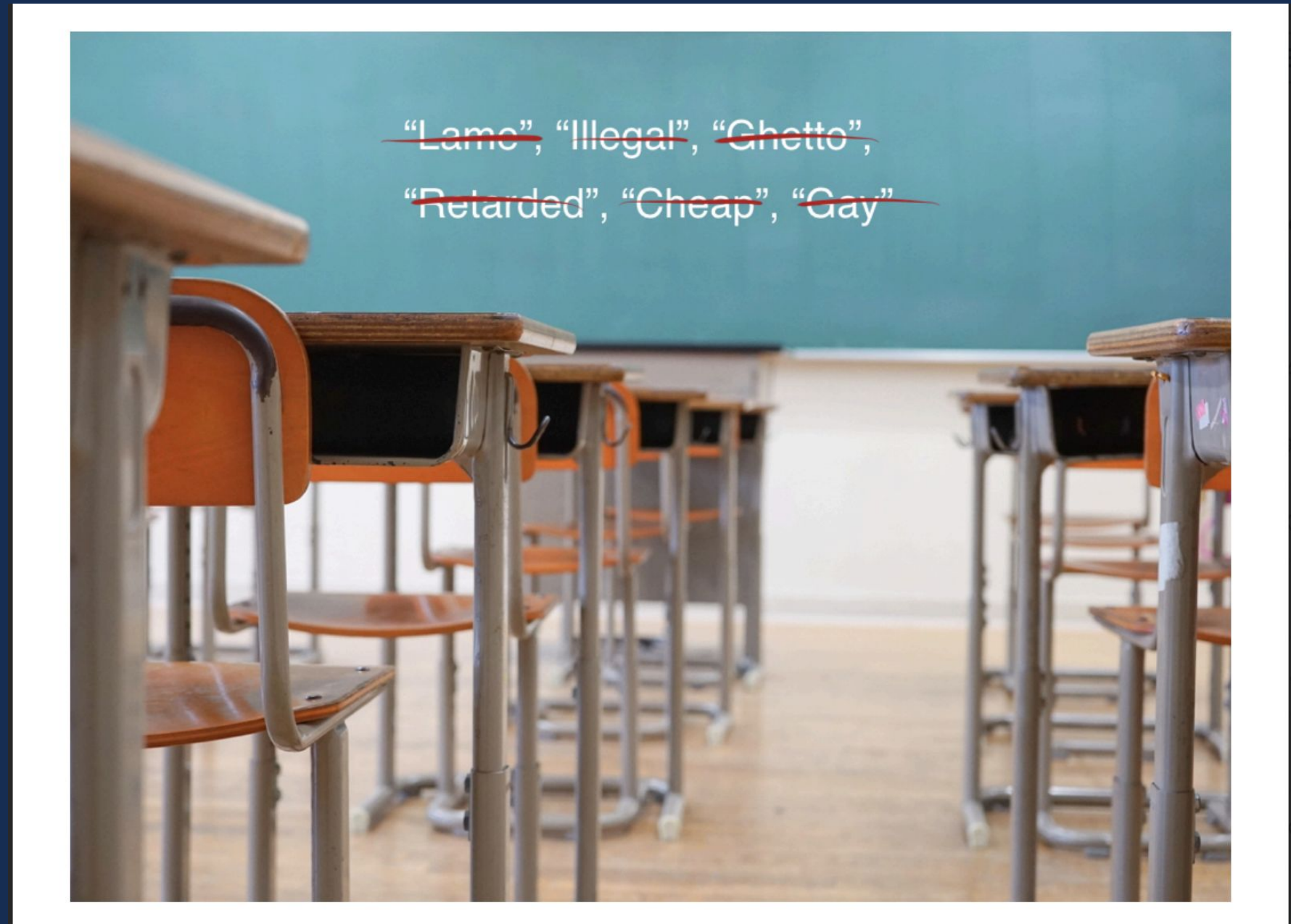
Prompt:

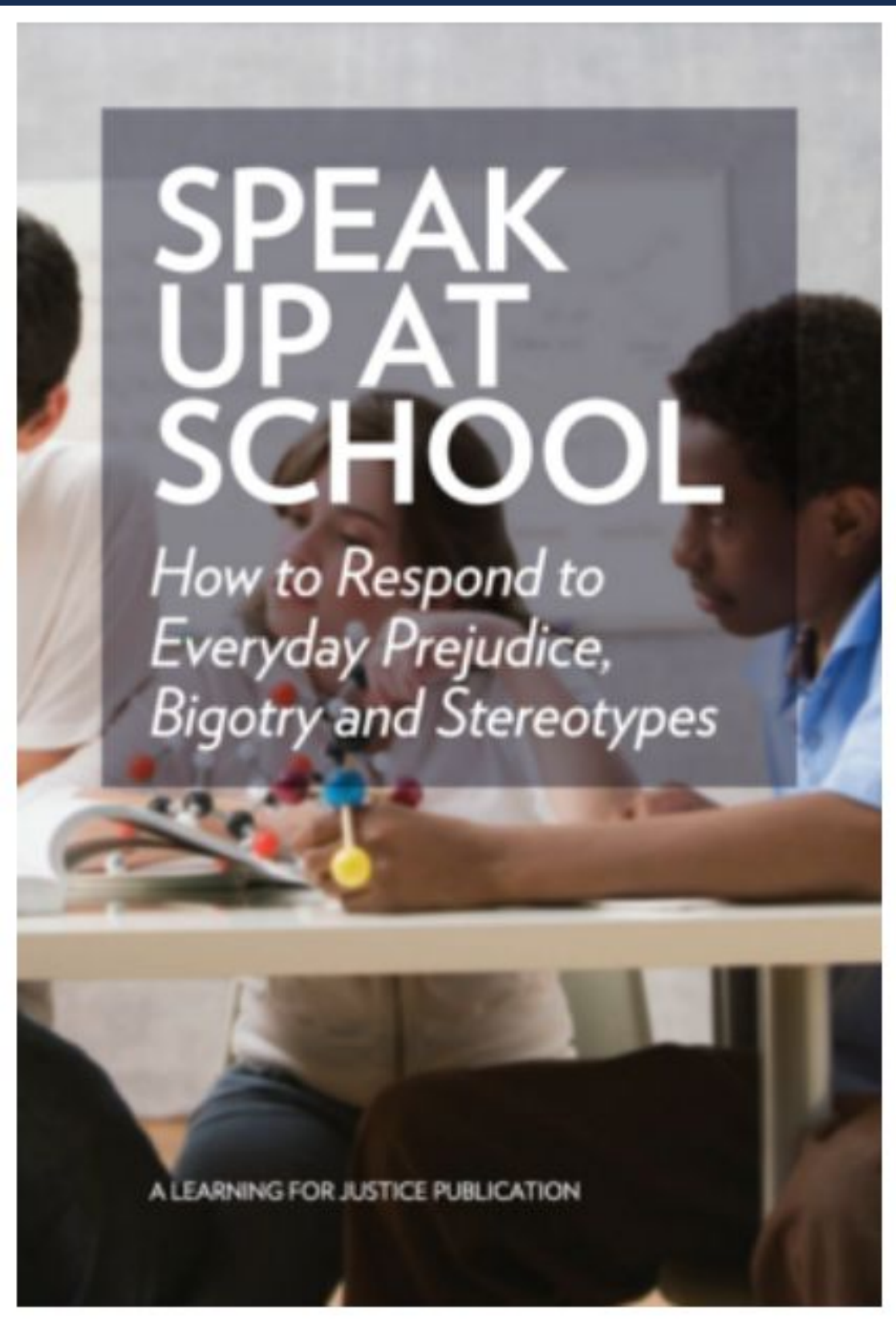
“What are examples of words or phrases we’ve heard in elementary settings that students might not realize are hurtful?”

Strategy: *Creating a classroom*

“Words That Help / Words That Hurt” chart is a strategy our staff is developing.

Why Words Matter





Speaking Up Against Bias in Schools

Some children grow up hearing language that gives certain words power.

We can teach that words have meaning, but we can also learn to choose better ones.

Our goal isn't to shame — it's to teach and support.

When students know why words matter, they are more likely to change behavior.

Four Key Strategies

- Interrupt biased comments
- Question the speaker's intent
- Educate about impact
- Echo support for targets

Context Matters

Your relationship with the speaker and location affect how you respond - classroom, hallway, cafeteria, or teacher's lounge

SPEAKING UP AT SCHOOL:

Training is Important – But So Is Follow-Through

Our Ongoing Work - Responding as a Staff

- Development of a clear and consistent response pathway.
- Trust comes from follow-up.
- If a student or family reports hurtful language, we respond with care and action.
- This includes communicating clearly with families about what language is not appropriate at school – even if it's allowed at home.

The Two Sides of Support: Support and Empowerment

- We want to support students who experience hurtful language while building resilience and empowerment.
- We don't want to create a sense of helplessness — but we do want to acknowledge harm.
- We use “size of the problem” strategies / tools to help students respond appropriately.

“When someone says something unkind, ask yourself — is it true? If it's not, you don't have to own it!”

“Respond with Care” / “Build Inner Strength.”

Helping Children Understand Their Own Power

- We work to teach our students to stand strong in who they are.
- When someone says, “Your art is ugly,” help them check that thought: “Do you think it’s ugly?” “No!” “Then you’re okay — you get to decide what’s true for you.”
- We use a resilience frameworks already familiar to staff (Size of the Problem, Zones of Regulation, etc.) to help students manage responses.

**What strategies do you use with your children to ‘own their power’
after hearing something hurtful?**

Responding to Hurtful or Biased Language - Using “Size of the Problem” Processes

Responding to Hurtful or Biased Language - can be used with a child either being the subject of hurtful language OR a child using hurtful language:

Pause and Name It - “Let’s pause. I heard words that weren’t kind or respectful.”

Reflection: Let’s think about the *size of this problem*. When someone uses words that hurt or make others feel left out, that’s a **big problem**, because it affects how safe and welcome people feel.”

Reflect Together: “How do you think that comment might make someone feel?” “What could we say or do instead that shows respect?”

Repair and Rebuild: “When we have a *big problem*, we use our *big problem strategies* – take responsibility, apologize, and learn from it so it doesn’t happen again.”

Key Message for Students

“Small problems are things we can fix quickly and easily.

Big problems are when someone’s feelings or safety are hurt.

Using hurtful or biased language is a **big problem** – and we work together to make it right.”

Student Roll-out Plan - Spring 2026

Next Steps

- Staff: continue to reinforce and support these practices - practice Speaking Out in all contexts
- Use Size of the Problem as a Strategy for Speaking Out, as well as children's literature as a starting point
- ASB students work with Susie and Val to develop videos/presentations for K-2.
- 3-5 classrooms engage in guided conversations or videos led by teachers/staff.
- Include age-appropriate reflection questions: What words help people feel good at school? What words hurt?
- Integrate Taproot Theatre *Recognize, Refuse, Report* message across grades.
- Hate Speech: deepen and extend this work for the 2026-2027 school year
- This can't be a one-time lesson — it has to be part of our daily language.
- We model appropriate language every day — even when students use words that might be accepted at home but not at school.
- Use the Orca Code as an anchor: Respect Self, Respect Others, Respect Our School.

Using Children's Literature as a First Step



Children's literature provides a *safe, shared context* to begin talking about bias and hurtful language before it gets personal or defensive.

What are examples of other books you have used that could help our youngest children understand the power of words?

Moving From Awareness to Action

On the next slides, there are videos of educators making statements regarding their own experiences

- What language do we notice? What themes or patterns stand out?
- How do the strategies connect to the Orca Code?
- How might I use these strategies with my own children?
- How can I interrupt bias with a colleague, acquaintance, family member or others in a way that teaches, not shames?



Video 1 Discussion

Reflection 1 - students who made the statement: What might have motivated them? What were they thinking or feeling?

Reflection 2 - students laughing: Why did they laugh? What does their response tell us?

Reflection on the Pocket Guide

Stop and Think

How does the pocket guide help you speak up against biased language, prejudice and stereotypes at school?



Pair and share your thoughts.

Student Impact

How does the pocket guide help your students speak up against biased language, prejudice and stereotypes at school?





Video 3 Discussion

What might the principal in this case do?

What might an individual teacher do or say?



Video 5 Discussion / Reflection

How can you make it clear that you are attentive to the needs of the child and also appeal to the parent's sense of fairness?

Preparing Ourselves, our Children and Families To Speak Up



COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

1. Stay engaged:

- Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue”

2. Experience discomfort:

- This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race and other biased language, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society and in our schools. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, the healing and change begin.

3. Speak your truth:

- This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.

4. Expect and accept lack of closure:

- This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue.

Putting It All Together

Be Prepared

Anticipate and rehearse responses to bias

Be Positive

Assume good intentions while addressing harmful impact

Be Confident

Trust your ability to make a difference

Work Together

Create a supportive community approach



Closing: Walking Away with Tools

- How to interrupt biased or hurtful language among staff and students - Practicing and consistently using the 4 strategies.
- How to teach students to recognize, refuse, and report - Ongoing Staff Discussion.
- How to reinforce our values through the Orca Code.
- Embedding this work into daily teaching — not just during a training or assembly.
- Using children’s literature as a starting point

We Are a Caring School

When we help students understand words, build resilience, and model respect — we create a school where every child feels they belong.

Final Reflections / Steps:

What strategy gives you the confidence to Speak Up?

Print the “*Speak up at School Pocket Guide*” and discuss at home with your family:

https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/speak_up_pocket_card_2up.pdf