



THE TOOTHPASTE LESSON



The Toothpaste Lesson is a memorable community-building activity that helps students understand the lasting impact of their words. It creates a shared language for kindness, accountability, and thoughtful communication that can be revisited throughout the school year.

WHAT?

Students work individually or in small groups to squeeze an entire tube of toothpaste onto a plate or tray. They are then challenged to put the toothpaste back into the tube using toothpicks, cotton swabs, or similar materials. As students struggle, the teacher connects the activity to the power of words, once spoken, they can't be taken back completely.

WHEN?

Great for students at **any grade level**:

- Beginning of the school year
- Establishing classroom expectations and community
- SEL lessons about kindness and empathy
- Digital citizenship and online communication
- Addressing conflicts or hurtful language
- Reinforcing respectful classroom interactions

WHY?

- Helps students understand the lasting impact of their words.
- Builds empathy, accountability, and self-control.
- Creates a common classroom reference for discussing respectful communication, conflict, and repairing relationships.

HOW?

1. Give each student or group a tube of toothpaste and a plate or tray.
2. Have students squeeze all the toothpaste out.
3. Challenge them to put the toothpaste back into the tube using cotton swabs.
4. Discuss why it was difficult & connect the experience to the lasting impact of words.
5. Create an anchor chart or classroom agreement that can be referenced throughout the year.

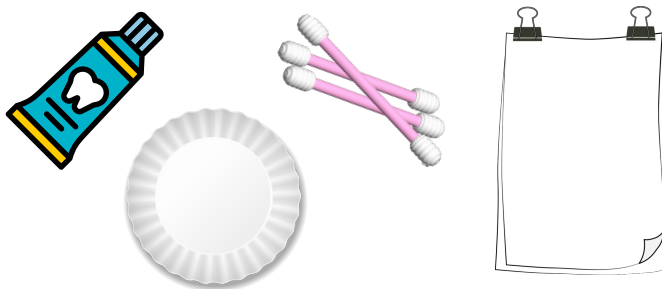
TEACHER TALK:

"Were you able to put *all* of the toothpaste back into the tube?"

"Can we ever completely take our words back?"

"Our words matter because they leave a lasting impact."

MATERIALS



BIG IDEA

Think before you speak, because your words have the power to last. We can apologize, but we can't always erase their impact.