

## Unit Lesson Plan for What Words Mean

Possible readings to include for this unit are listed on pg. ix-x in *Made with Words*.

### Essay Prompt (adapted from *Language Awareness* pg. 372):

Do words really have as much power as described in Martha Irvine's article, "Queer Revolution"? Write an essay defending or criticizing the use of certain words that have sharply divergent meanings and that in one context might be considered inflammatory, on others complimentary. Explain the difference between the use of a word to defeat its negativity, and the "abuse" of a word as a means of insult. Where does one draw the line? You may find it helpful to read Gloria Naylor's "The Meanings of a Word" before starting to write.

### Day 1: Introduction to Unit

- Talk to students about themes of unit and unit essay.
- Begin discussion by talking about how words have multiple meanings, how the definitions of words change over time, and the distinct meanings words may have among particular communities or in particular contexts.
- Ask students for examples of words with multiple meanings
  - Make a list on the board.
    - Initially, encourage students to guess/talk through/predict the multiple meanings and contexts of the examples they choose. Build knowledge organically as a class.
  - Offer some examples that will lead to interesting etymology searches.
  - Model some online etymology searches for a selection of the examples on the board in order to introduce students to electronic/library sources they will be using throughout the unit. Use the following (if you have access to technology in the classroom):
    - Regular dictionary and thesaurus (talk about what the differences are between these types of references)
    - *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Oxford Reference Online: Premium Collection* (accessible through Library's electronic references page)
      - Use this to explore history as well as suffix, root, and prefix of particular words
    - Urban Dictionary for colloquial meanings: <http://www.urbandictionary.com> (if the word is slang)
    - Visual Thesaurus or Dictionary: <http://www.visualthesaurus.com>
- Go over the reading and writing schedule for the unit; introduce students to the essay they will read for Day 2.
  - If there is time, begin reading this text as a class with a focus on identifying important ideas/arguments and highlighting complex/interesting/confusing quotes.

- Homework: Finish Reading #1 and answer comprehension questions about this reading

**Day 2: Discuss Reading #1**

- Go over comprehension question; freewrite; ask students to make a list of words that function similarly to the word discussed in Reading #1
  - As a class, work with students to come up with a list of words related to the word *cripple*, *bitch*, or *queer* depending on which text the instructor chooses for Reading #1.
    - For example, if reading Martha Irvine’s “Queer Revolution,” students may discuss the multiple (and changing) meanings of words such as *gay*, *fag/faggot*, *dyke* to consider what each say about our society’s larger expectations, beliefs, and prejudices related to sexuality.
- Homework: Reading #2. Write a summary of Reading #2. Then choose one quote you thought was particularly interesting and write a paragraph about it: remember to introduce the quote with a signal phrase, use proper MLA in-text citation, and include 2-3 sentences about why you think this quote is interesting.

**Day 3: Discuss Reading #2**

- Talk about readings and assign groups for Day 3 and Day 4 etymology project.
- If technology permits, students should work in groups to choose a word that is related to the word discussed in Reading #1 or Reading #2 and use numerous electronic sources introduced on Day 1 to research the etymology and colloquial definitions/connotations of this word.
- Homework: Reading #3 and continue research of the group word individually. Students should bring copies of printed sources as well as a one-page write-up that describes what he/she discovered about the word in the group and on her own.

**Day 4: Visual Presentation of Word Etymologies**

- Group members share and compare their individual research. Groups use posterboard and markers to create their own visual etymology of the word chosen by the group.
- In the last half of class, students share their visual etymologies.
- Go over essay assignment and answer questions about first draft (15 minutes).
- Homework: First draft of unit essay (2-3 pages)

**Day 5: Essay Workshop**

- Work on central claims and MLA in-text citation and Works Cited page.
- Homework: Second draft of unit essay (3-4 pages)

**Day 6: Essay Workshop**

- Work on providing evidence and quoting.
- Peer review

**Day 7: Essay Workshop**

- Students receive feedback on second drafts
- Writing Workshop
- Homework: Complete the final draft of your essay.