

Don't Label Others

Use this object lesson to help students understand that all of them will make some bad choices over the course of the year, and that one bad word or action does not define who a person is.

- Print the labels onto full-page or six-section label sheets.
- Select two or more volunteers who seem to be more thick-skinned. Pull them aside to explain the activity, and ask if they would be comfortable with you pretending to say bad things about them.
- Tell the class you will have a math drill to see how well they remember things.
- Ask your volunteers math or grammar questions that are several grades above their level, and which you are certain they will get wrong.
- For each wrong answer, put a label, such as “Not Smart” on them.
- Ask the class if this seems fair. No, it's not, because these students haven't learned those math rules yet. So how on earth could you possibly expect them to answer the questions? Each year they will learn new math rules. But no one expects them to answer questions they're not old enough for yet.
- Explain that just like _____ graders have not yet learned the rules for _____ grade math (or grammar), they also haven't learned all of the social rules for what is and isn't considered polite.
- Replace the first set of labels with the second set, such as “mean girl.”
- Explain that just like it's wrong to think a _____ grader isn't smart for not knowing a _____ math question, it's also wrong to think someone is a bully or your enemy because they are still learning all the social rules for how to treat other people.
- Remind students that when they were toddlers, they acted in ways that would be considered rude now. But they hadn't learned those social rules yet. Every year, they will get better and better at social rules, just like every year they will get better and better at math. And just like everyone memorizes their math rules at a different pace, their classmates will be memorizing social rules at a different pace. We all have to be patient with each other.
- Explain that the more grace each of them shows to one another when they mess up, the easier it will be to expect grace from others when they are the ones who mess up.

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Not
Smart

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Lazy



HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Daydreamer

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Weak

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Slacker

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Weirdo

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Mean Girl

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Bully



HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Problem
Kid

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Tattletale

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Nasty

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Enemy

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Bossy

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

Snobby



HELLO

MY NAME IS:

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

HELLO

MY NAME IS:

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Show students this famous optical illusion *My Wife and My Mother-In-Law*, by the cartoonist W. E. Hill, 1915 (adapted from a picture going back at least to an 1888 German postcard)

- Ask students what they see?
- Point out how this can either look like a young woman wearing a choker necklace with her face turned away, or an old woman with a large nose and chin.
- Once they see the second image, it is hard to see the first one again.
- The same is true when we label people. Once we make up our minds that someone is mean, or bossy, or rude, or weird, it's hard to notice all the things that make them the opposite.
- Just because someone does something mean a few times, does not mean that they are a mean person. We have all done mean things and would not want other people to label us forever based on those mistakes.
- Just because someone does something rude a few times, does not mean that they are a rude person. We have all done rude things and would not want other people to label us forever based on those mistakes.
- Just because someone does something bossy a few times, does not mean that they are a bossy person. We have all done bossy things and would not want other people to label us forever based on those mistakes.
- Just because someone does something weird a few times, does not mean that they are a weird person. We have all done weird things and would not want other people to label us forever based on those mistakes.

