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Level: Grades 6

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Lesson Plan

Put Downs

Overview

This lesson focuses on put-down mentality in the media. Through a series of activities and classroom discussion, students explore how put-downs are used in TV situation comedy, film, music, fashion, pop culture and advertising and how put-downs affect one's self-esteem and social/emotional well-being.

Learning Outcomes

To enable students to:

- describe how and why they have been put down or have put down others
- cite media examples
- classify and evaluate the types of put-downs
- discuss and evaluate the sources and effects of the put-down mentality

Preparation & Materials

- Photocopy *Media Log* handout.
- Video, film, pop culture magazines, newspapers and music

Procedure

1. Put-Downs

- Tell a story about someone who has been hurt by name-calling or an insult. (This may arise out of a current incident in the classroom that would make for a natural lead-in to the topic.)
- Ask students about the concept of put-downs, without referring to the media. You might want to consider the following questions:
 - How many of you have been put down by insults or name-calling?
 - How does it make you feel?
 - Why do you think people put down other people?
- Ask students to write about put-down experiences from both the receiving and dishing-out perspectives.
- In small groups, have students brainstorm examples of put-downs in television shows, films, comics and pop music. (Headings can be listed on the board.) After 5 minutes, have the recorder in each group share that group's results with the rest of the class.

2. All Media are Constructions

- Define the various media to be scrutinized and hand out the *Media Log*. The *Media Log* or chart contains the following headings:
 - **Source** – TV Shows, Movies, Songs, Magazines
 - **Put-down or insult** – describe briefly
 - **Context** – comedy, drama
 - **Personal reaction** – very amusing, so-so, not funny at all
- Divide the class into four groups.

- Assign each group a media category such as TV, Movies, Songs/Music Videos or Magazines. Have the students complete their Media Logs according to their media category. For example, students in the TV group can watch episodes of their favorite sitcoms, or students in the Magazine group can use their favorite magazines. It is helpful if students within groups try to avoid duplication, in order to get a wider variety of examples and reactions. As a group, have students discuss their reactions to the types of put-downs that they have found, and have the group summarize their findings in a presentation to the class.

3. The Media Construct Reality (History of Put-downs in the Media)

Share results from the media log homework assignment

Show clips from early film comedy, e.g., Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges.

Examine the use of insult and aggression in comedy by looking at some of the following:

- **Advertising** -- show the T-mobile "Animals" ad, available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6efOJ93Ulc4
- **Television** -- The Simpsons, Friends, The Office, Family Guy, South Park (the last two may contain content not appropriate for class)
- **Comics** -- Peanuts, Blondie, Garfield
- **Merchandising** -- discuss the "Happy Bunny" Valentine cards; you can view some at www.currentcatalog.com/088000.html

4. Commercial Implications of Media "They're Selling Us an Image"

To help students spot the sources of the put-down mentality and to evaluate its effects, ask them to examine current advertisements and spot what/who's "cool" and who/what isn't. You might want to concentrate on the following areas: fashion, pop idols, sports stars, disabilities, racial groups, nationalities and religions.

Show video clips of commercials and television shows that have stimulated trends.

Discuss how put-downs can happen because some people are unable or unwilling to follow these trends.

5. Social and Political Implications "Just a Joke"

This drama lesson involves students in role plays and improvisations around the theme "How do you feel when ...?" For instance, you could ask students to imagine how they might feel if they were to receive one of the more insulting "Happy Bunny" Valentine's cards, such as "When you think back on what we had, I hope that you'll be floating face down in a river, and you'll always know that part of me will never care about you," or "2 cute 2 talk 2 u."

Either as a class or in small groups, ask students to come up with a list of possible put-down scenarios.

After they have enacted several role plays, ask the students to consider the following questions:

- How do you feel when someone says it's "just a joke," after putting you down?
- Is it possible to simply ignore teasing or insults?
- How can you handle similar situations in real life?

Evaluation

- charts and samples done as homework
- journal of reactions to put-downs
- class participation
- involvement in one of the following extension ideas:

Puppetry

- research Punch and Judy puppet shows
- construct puppets
- perform for classmates or other groups of children

Drama

- research Commedia dell'Arte
- construct masks
- perform a scene, using only a scenario and improvisation
- read the script for "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" or read one of the comic strips
- perform a scene that uses put-down humour, e.g., Charlie Brown puts himself down about eating peanut butter
- put together a collective creation about put-downs and how they entertain and hurt

Debate

- "Put-downs should be banned from TV" or "Put-downs should be banned from school"

Evaluation

- Questionnaire and journals

Student Handout #1

Media Log

Name _____

Source:

Putdown or insult:

Context:

Personal Reaction: