

Grades 6–8 **March** Sport of the Month

Special Olympics



Basketball is one of the top sports at Special Olympics. Young players learn to handle the ball and dribble, and older players learn the strategies to play a challenging game. Basketball is also a favorite sport for Special Olympics Unified Sports in which players with and without intellectual disabilities form teams to play other Unified teams. It's a learning experience that's also a lot of fun.

Dear Family,

This month we are discussing one of the most serious aspects of discrimination in our communities—our words and the tremendous impact they have on people. In particular, we'll focus on the words *retard* and *retarded* and how those terms affect people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and friends.

Our lessons this month will be greatly affected by the word choices students hear at home, from parents, siblings, friends, and others. We urge you to join our quest to use words that help, not harm, others in your daily interactions.

teacher signature

This month's theme: **power of words**

Many of our discussions this month will hinge on an inspiring and thought-provoking speech by a student named Soeren Palumbo. You can view *Taking a Stand Against the R-Word* at <http://www.specialolympics.org/educators>. We'll also discuss examples of the *R-word* being used by celebrities and in movies or TV shows.

Students will reflect in their journals about an experience from their own lives, at school, or in their community when they either discriminated against someone, stood by quietly as a friend did so, or were a victim of discrimination. You may want to discuss such instances ahead of time with your child or ask your child about what they wrote in their journal entry.

The goal of our exercises is to empower students to see how they can do their part in changing perceptions and language to end intolerance toward those with intellectual disabilities.

What you can do:



Everyone has faced discrimination at some point in their lives. Talk honestly with your child about a time when you experienced or witnessed discrimination. Do you wish you had reacted differently? How? How would you want your own child to react in a similar situation? Then discuss discrimination against those with intellectual disabilities specifically. Have you witnessed this? When? How did you react? How would you want your own child to react if facing similar circumstances?

Most importantly, as mentioned above, the best way to emphasize the importance of the power of words is to set an example yourself. Think about your own speech and the words you typically use. Many of us are guilty of using the words *retard* and *retarded* in our daily speech, along with other hurtful terms. Discuss this with your child and with your entire family and focus on eliminating this hurtful word and others from your vocabulary.