



Sport of the Month



basketball

March

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

Goals:

- Determine words that have a positive impact on an individual's feeling of self-worth.
- Incorporate positive words into daily speech and writing.
- Understand how negative words can impact individuals and work to change negative speech in the school community.

Basketball in 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.

How do Special Olympics activities impact students? Here's how one teacher answered:

"We were able to provide several leadership opportunities for students with and without disabilities. Each even reached out to a different population of the school, which created a more lasting impact in our work toward a more unified school!"

Week 1:

First, explain to your students the definitions of *positive*, *negative*, and *self-esteem*.

- Positive—having a good impact or optimistic outlook
- Negative—having a bad impact or pessimistic outlook
- Self-esteem—the way we feel about ourselves, our sense of personal worth

Brainstorm a list of words that are negative, followed by a list of words that are positive. Some examples of negative words to get started with are *bad*, *boring*, *dumb*, *lazy*, *sad*, *slow*, *weak*, and *weird*. Some examples of positive words to get started with are *adorable*, *agreeable*, *brave*, *clever*, *confident*, *eager*, *friendly*, *funny*, *good*, *great*, *happy*, and *trustworthy*.

As students contribute words, discuss whether each one is positive or negative. Then write a simple sentence on the board, such as *The puppy played with the kitty*. Add a positive or negative word before each noun; then talk about the power that word has to change the sentence. Try several examples. To finish, have students write the lists in their writing journals.





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Week 2:

Take Action!

- Encourage your students to join a Young Athletes sport and play program where individuals with and without disabilities develop their skills and have a ton of fun! To find a Young Athletes program in your area, contact your local Special Olympics office.

Begin by reminding your students about the difference positive and negative words can have on a sentence and remind them of the definition of *self-esteem*. Choose a few words from the lists your class generated the previous week and ask your students whether each word is a positive or negative one. Then ask students what impact these positive and negative words might have on an individual's self-esteem.

Choose a writing prompt from the list below and have students complete the writing exercise in their journals, using positive words from their lists and adding other positive words as they think of them. Remind students about the parts of a letter—the heading, which includes the recipient's address and the date; the greeting; the body; the closing; and the signature.

- Write a letter to a parent or sibling telling him or her how important he or she is to you.
- Write a letter to your favorite pet to show the positive difference the animal has made in your life.
- Write a letter to a classmate or friend that encourages him or her to do well on an upcoming test.
- Write a letter to a faraway relative, encouraging that person to visit.

Give your class time to complete these assignments, assisting younger students as needed. Once they're done, share portions of different letters and discuss the response they'd be likely to elicit from the recipient.

Week 3:

Have your students watch *Join Hands*, an inspiring video from Special Olympics. You'll find the video at <http://www.specialolympics.org/educators>. As students watch, invite them to jot down or sketch powerful and inspiring words that the video makes them think of.

Explain to students that this video celebrates Special Olympics athletes. Discuss the symbolism of joining hands; then invite students to share their new lists of powerful and inspiring words. Finally, invite students to fold construction paper to make cards. Have them use their powerful words and images to create inspiring cards for Special Olympics athletes. Coordinate with your local Special Olympics office to deliver the cards.

Optional: Depending on the age and maturity levels of your students, you might also choose to discuss a negative word that many of them might have heard: *retard* or *retarded*. Explain that the *R*-word is demeaning to people with intellectual disabilities and their families and that students should never use it. If desired, let them know that this word should be added to their negative words list; have them use red pens, crayons, or markers when they add this word.

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March events:

- Spread the Word to End the Word





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Week 4:

Program Spotlight: Get Into It® Active

Get Into It® Active is designed to allow students to be the teachers and for the playground, soccer field, or gymnasium to be the classroom! The lessons are condensed from the larger Get Into It® curriculum and focus on the physical activities and discussions in the curriculum. Use these activities during recess, physical education classes, or as part of Unified Sports or Young Athletes program.

To request a free copy of Get Into It® Active, contact rralston@specialolympics.org.

In advance, ask parents to send in discarded magazines. Divide your class into small groups. Assign each group one of the positive words from the list your class generated previously.

Next, have a member of each group write their word at the top of a large sheet of construction paper. Then give students time to cut images from magazines and other sources that give examples of their word. Have students cover the paper with images, gluing them into place to create vibrant collages.

When the projects are complete, ask the groups to present their work to the class. Finally, use the encouraging and motivational posters to create a classroom display that will promote the use of positive words in your school community. Or, as an alternative, contact your local Special Olympics office to see if the posters can be displayed at an upcoming Special Olympics event.

