



Teacher's Guide for The Power of Words

The power of words is a prominent theme in Jewish wisdom, and “Guarding Your Tongue” is a particularly important value. According to tradition, words can create an entire world out of nothing (Genesis 1); however, they can also destroy a person’s soul (Proverbs 15:4).

The texts and guiding questions included here on the “The Power of Words” provide an opportunity to explore the core Jewish value of Guarding Your Tongue. The texts fall into a variety of categories:

- The Nature of Words
- The Power of Words
- Think Before You Speak
- Encouragement/Discouragement
- Keeping Silent
- Assisting the Poor
- Sincerity
- Honesty/Deceit
- Distress/Anger
- *Lashon Hara* (The Evil Tongue, i.e. truthful speech that is meant to hurt others)
- Advice
- Words of Torah

Of course, a text appearing in one category here does not mean that it does not belong in another category as well.

This resource provides contemporary interpretation and application of the (sometimes contradictory) wisdom of the sages. Use the texts and guiding questions for a general exploration of guarding one’s tongue or use them to help guide a class discussion when a particular event occurs. For example:

- The class is looking for ways to deal with a traumatic event either within the walls of the school or in the world at large.
- A public figure uses harsh rhetoric to inflame the public.
- People are looking for language that will allow for respectful dialogue amid disagreement.
- A class member says something particularly inappropriate about a classmate.
- A public figure demonstrates a specious commitment to objective truth.
- Someone is feeling particularly down and needs encouraging words to pick them up.

Optional Concluding Activity

Print and distribute copies of the speech bubble located on the next page. Invite students to reflect on their learning and then fill in the bubble with their thoughts about the power of words.

