

FOUNDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

Using Diplomatic Language

OBJECTIVE(S)

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify differences between diplo-speak and daily-speak
2. Improve persuasive writing/speaking skills
3. Self-edit everyday language to conform to UN diplomatic norms of language

REQUIREMENTS

Level: 8-12 Grade(s)

Time: 45-90 minutes

PROCEDURE (Please use additional space as needed)

I. Lesson Introduction/Activation of Prior Knowledge

This lesson is intended to define and introduce students to the differences between daily speech and the diplomatic language of the United Nations, in order to make it easier for students to grasp the means and goals of diplomacy.

II. Activity

The teacher should begin by asking the class to speculate on differences between everyday and diplomatic language, or "UN-speak." The teacher may give examples to illustrate intensity as the main difference between the language of diplomacy and the words we use day-to-day. There are several ways to do this.

1. Contrast sentences of daily speech with those of diplomatic language.

Normal words: "I'm not talking to you anymore!"

UN speak: "Taking recent events into account, Sam has decided to temporarily suspend diplomatic meetings and negotiation in the interest of maintaining peaceful regional relations."

2. Give examples of how adjectives applied to normal terms can turn them into UN-speak.

Normal words: disagree, problem, etc.

UN speak: respectfully disagree, minor problem, etc.

3. Show how the intensity of words is amplified and exaggerated when behaving diplomatically.

i.e. minor = major, serious = incredibly important, probable = definite

Students should exaggerate the meaning words when making choices between words that may have similar but not exact meanings. They should always favor the word they judge to have the less intense, or more subtle, meaning.

Now, ask students to practice using diplomatic language themselves. Have them pretend that they just got in a huge fight with a friend, family member, or girl/boyfriend. Have them write a letter describing how angry they are, including what happened, why they feel this way, and what they want to do about it. Make sure they use as many angry words as possible.

Once they are finished, have them re-write the letter using diplomatic language, or "UN-speak." Delegates should use the third person voice, like they will during the conference. They must avoid being harsh or informal but be sure to still get your point across. They can look at lists of preambulatory and operative clauses to get ideas for the sorts of verbs they should be using.

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III. Closing/Wrap-Up

Ask students to share the one sentence from their first letter with the class, and then the revised sentence from the second letter. Take time to analyze the differences and the way they have used adjectives and less intense words to change the tone of their work. Even though debates at the UN can become very heated and emotional, a UN diplomat (and Model UN delegates) must keep language inoffensive and unemotional. A talented diplomat can convey a lot of strong feelings using very neutral language. This is an important skill to learn before a Model UN conference. Model UN often discourages UN-speak because it is only a model of the real thing, and the delegates involved have no real incentive to engage issues with the same fervor as real UN diplomats. This activity should help encourage them to be as diplomatic as possible, despite this fact.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Future In-class Follow-Up for Teachers

This activity can be repeated to hone the diplomatic skills of students. The activity can be done using different subjects, gradually increasing in complexity. It may also be done with other less-serious subjects, such as the one above. The point is to hone the writing and speaking skills of students for the purpose of a diplomatic exchange in which every word counts.

Homework

Use the diplomatic translations handout as a homework assignment, and go over their answers together during your next class period.