

DEVELOPING PERSONAL POWER



AGENDA

- Starter
- Short End of the Pencil
- It Comes in Many Sizes and Shapes
- Power Symbols
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will discover that they have the power to affect outcomes in their lives.

Students recognize that power lies in the decisions they make.

Students create personal symbols that remind them of their personal power.

Materials Needed

- Drawing paper, colored construction paper, colored markers, scissors, tape, paste, old magazines, and any other art materials you may have (Part III).

Starter (3 minutes)

Draw a horizontal line on the board. Divide the line into 10 segments and number each segment. Under the first division, write the word “None.” Under the center division (number 5), write the word “Some.” Under the last division (number 10), write the word “Lots.”

Referring to the line on the board, tell students to write down a number that represents the amount of power that they feel they have to do the following:

- Be in school on time
- Wear what they want
- Change someone’s mind about something
- Get good grades

After students have added up their numbers, explain the meaning of the score:

- A score above 20 means that you feel you have a considerable amount of personal power.
- A score below 20 means that you underestimate your personal power.

Explain that this lesson will focus on personal power—the power that an individual has to make choices or act.

Part I Short End of the Pencil (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that they have the power to affect outcomes in their lives.

1. Students listen to instructions.

Explain that students will work in pairs to conduct an experiment. Each pair of students must work with only one writing implement and one piece of paper. Ask students to find partners. Then, give the following instructions:

- You cannot talk to your partner from this point on.
- You must work with your partner, without talking, to draw a picture of an animal.
- Both partners must hold the pencil while drawing—one can hold the pencil at the top and the other can hold it at the bottom.
- You have two minutes to work.

2. Students work on a collaborative drawing.

Tell students to begin. Move around the room as students work, observing each pair's interactions and ensuring that no one is talking.

When time is up, invite pairs of students to hold up their drawings and describe what they drew. Just for fun, keep track of how many partners disagreed about the kind of animal they drew, and make an observation about this before moving on.

3. Students reflect on their experiences.

Encourage students to discuss the experiment, describing the aspects of it they found to be difficult and how they managed to work with their partners. Praise students who solved the communication problem by writing notes to each other.

Focus the discussion on individual decisions by asking questions such as the following:

- Was there a point in the experiment when you decided whether or not to cooperate?
- Did your decision have an effect on the outcome of the experiment for you and your partner?
- Could you have decided the other way? Would it have mattered?

Summarize the discussion by pointing out that each student had the power to make the experiment succeed or fail, because they each had the power to make a decision about cooperating. Tell students that people often have more power than they realize.

Part II It Comes in Many Sizes and Shapes (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that despite the forms power takes, true power always lies in the decisions they make.

1. Students explore different forms of power.

Prompt students to think about what gives people power by asking questions such as the following. Encourage students to explain their answers.

- Do you think money gives people power?
- Do you think beauty gives people power?
- What about physical size or age?
- Does education give people power?
- What other things give people power?

Have students brainstorm a list of the sources of power. Write their responses on the board. Afterward, take a quick poll of the class, item by item, noting how many agree that any particular item actually gives people power. Place a star beside the items most students agree on. Note that it seems as though power can come in many different forms.

2. Students consider people who have power.

Continue the discussion by inviting students to name two or three people who have more power than they do. Students will most likely name teachers, principals, older siblings, and parents/guardians. Invite students to give specific examples of how these people have more power.

3. Students trace the source of true power.

Explore each example given by making statements and asking questions to show students that they themselves hold the true power. For example, if a student believes that a teacher has power because they can make students stay after school, make the following points in sequence:

- The teacher does not have to make a student stay after school.
- The teacher has to make a decision about it.
- To get to that point, a student must have made a decision first.
- What decision must the student have made? (*The student must have decided to break a rule, the consequence of which is staying after school.*)

As you discuss other examples, encourage students to follow a similar path of logic to trace the source of power back to their own decisions.

Ask students if they think that the ability to make choices is a kind of power. As students agree, add this to the list on the board and circle it. Tell students that they will spend time later in this course learning about how to make better decisions.

Part III Power Symbols (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students create symbols that remind them of their personal power.

1. Students discuss the meaning of symbols.

Briefly discuss the meaning of symbols with students, checking to make sure that they understand how symbols stand for or represent something special to people. Explain that they will now think about and create a symbol that reminds them of their personal power.

Invite students to give examples of symbols that everyone understands, such as the American flag and how it uses stars and stripes to symbolize the states in the union. To prompt their thinking, draw an international symbol or a familiar street sign on the board. You may also give a familiar hand signal. Encourage students to think of as many different symbols as they can.

2. Students create personal symbols.

Invite students to choose whatever art materials they would like to use in their personal symbols. Point out that they may draw, cut and paste, or use a combination of techniques to construct their symbols. Explain that students may either borrow a symbol or create a unique one that has special meaning for them.

Circulate among students as they work, offering encouragement and support. If students seem interested, display their symbols in the room for a while before having students add them to their folders.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Have students describe the kind of power they have. Ask them how often they have the opportunity to use that power. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Personal power lies in the choices that you make.
- Your choices will have an effect on your own life and often the lives of others.
- You alone are responsible for how you use your power.

Student Assessment

1. List three things in your life over which you have power.
2. List three things that can give you power. How are these things within or not within your control?
3. Describe a situation in which you have exercised power. Explain what kind of power you exercised.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“We must concentrate on what we can do, and erase ‘can’t,’ ‘won’t,’ and ‘don’t think so’ from our vocabulary.”

Ask students to keep track of self-deprecating comments overheard in class during the week. Have students brainstorm ways to turn these comments into positive statements (e.g., “I’m so dumb” becomes “if I keep at this, I’ll get it”).

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students take a walk around the neighborhood and observe their surroundings. (You may also have them make these observations a part of their daily routines.) Have students discuss what they like best about their neighborhoods and what they’d like to change. Have students brainstorm ways they can influence their communities. Discuss how effecting change can help them feel powerful.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write a paragraph about what they’d change if they had the power of a superhero. How would they make their homes, school, or friendships different? Have volunteers share one change they’d like to make. Have other students suggest the first step toward making this possible.

Core Content Curriculum Connection

Wrap up a history, science, or literature lesson by charting what would have happened if a key player had made a different choice every time they had a chance to do so. For example, discuss what might have happened if early American settlers had chosen to stay in Europe. Have students make similar charts in small groups.

Homework

Have students create lists comparing the amount of personal power they have now to the power they had when they were younger. Have students share their work. Discuss how personal power can be taken away if not used responsibly.

Additional Resources

Have students read “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me” by Maya Angelou. Have students discuss how this poem reflects the use of personal power.