

Is Pizza Epic?

Word Choice

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Grade Level	7th – 8th Grade	**Time Frame**	100 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	1-2 class period(s)

Essential Question

How can word choice affect communication?

Summary

The use of informal language and phrases in our writing and speaking is part of our culture. Idioms, slang, understatements, and hyperboles help characterize language by region, time period, and groups of people. Language, though, often benefits from precision, and appropriate word choice helps articulate what a writer truly wants to say without resorting to overused, trendy, and often inaccurate phrases. In this lesson, students will examine pieces of writing for modern hyperbole or inappropriate word choice and practice using precise language for the appropriate audience and purpose. This lesson can be completed in 1–2 class periods, depending on whether you decide to facilitate the optional class discussion.

Snapshot

Engage

Students work in pairs to match images with definitions.

Explore

Students work in the same pairs to match images with new definitions, leading to a discussion of appropriate word choice.

Explain

Students work with a handout of commonly overused or misused words and phrases, adding their own examples and suggesting alternatives.

Extend

Students work in pairs to complete a CER strategy in which they provide a claim, evidence, and reasoning to avoid a particular word choice and choose more precise language instead.

Evaluate

Students practice talking about word choice with their peers through a "Yes, Because..." activity.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - English (6-12)

TOD 301: Delete material because it is obviously irrelevant in terms of the focus of the essay
KLA 404: Use the word or phrase most appropriate in terms of the content of the sentence when the vocabulary is relatively common

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 7)

7.4.R.5: Students will use a dictionary, glossary, or a thesaurus (print and/or electronic) to determine or clarify the meanings, syllabication, pronunciation, synonyms, and parts of speech of words.
7.4.W.1: Students will use domain-appropriate vocabulary to communicate ideas in writing clearly.

Attachments

- CER—Is Pizza Epic - Spanish.docx
- CER—Is Pizza Epic - Spanish.pdf
- CER—Is Pizza Epic.docx
- CER—Is Pizza Epic.pdf
- Card Match Set 1—Is Pizza Epic.docx
- Card Match Set 1—Is Pizza Epic.pdf
- Card Match Set 2—Is Pizza Epic.docx
- Card Match Set 2—Is Pizza Epic.pdf
- Card Match Teacher's Guide—Is Pizza Epic.docx
- Lesson Slides—Is Pizza Epic.pptx
- Overused and Misused Words—Is Pizza Epic - Spanish.docx
- Overused and Misused Words—Is Pizza Epic - Spanish.pdf
- Overused and Misused Words—Is Pizza Epic.docx
- Overused and Misused Words—Is Pizza Epic.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Card Match Set 1 (attached; one copy of each per pair of students; printed, cut out, and placed in a separate envelope or bag per set)
- Card Match Set 2 (attached; one copy of each per pair of students; printed, cut out, and placed in a separate envelope or bag per set)
- Card Match Teacher’s Guide (attached)
- Overused and Misused Words handout (attached; one per student)
- CER handout (attached; one per student)
- Laptop or Tablet to connect to internet

Engage

Teacher's Note: Lesson Prep

Prior to beginning the lesson, print and cut out the **Card Match Set 1** and **Card Match Set 2** cards for each pair of students. Place each set of cards in a separate envelope or bag. You'll use Set 1 in the Engage activity and Set 2 in the Explore activity.

Using the attached slide show to introduce the lesson topic on **slide 2**. Display **slides 3-4** to introduce the essential question and lesson objectives. Explain to students that they will be completing a challenge. Put students into groups of two or three. Use the Card Matching strategy to help students engage with the definitions.

Pass out the **Card Match Set 1** cards to each pair or group. Display **slide 5** and explain that the task is to match each image with the definition that fits most closely. Use the 5-minute timer on the slide.

Do not offer any hints or suggestions right now; just encourage students to do their best! The definitions provided are those of overused words. The challenge is that the definitions do not adequately represent the images. The students will struggle, but that's the point. Use the **Card Match Teacher's Guide** to help you support students.

After time is up transition to **slide 6**. It is likely that different pairs of students will have used different definitions for each of the pictures. Ask how students chose the definitions to go with their pictures.

Collect the Card Match Set 1 cards from students before proceeding to the next activity.

Teacher's Note: Considering Multiple Meanings

Throughout this lesson, select terms and their definitions are referenced for student use and discussion. It is important to tell students that words have multiple meanings to consider and that these meanings often evolve over time. For example, in this lesson "epic" as a noun "refers to a work of heroic poetry;" as an adjective, it is "extending beyond the usual or ordinary especially in size or scope." Referring to a pizza as epic is an overstatement/hyperbole, but the use of the word as an adjective is acceptable, albeit not the best word choice.

Explore

Display **slide 7**. Pass out the **Card Match Set 2** cards to each group. Tell students that they will be doing another round of matching with the same images, but this time with new definitions. Start the 5-minute timer on the slide. This second round ought to be quicker for students because Matching Set 2 has definitions of words that closely correlate with the pictures. Use the **Card Match Teacher's Guide** to help you support students.

After time is up transition to **slide 8**. Ask how students chose the definitions to go with the pictures.

Collect the Card Match Set 2 cards.

Now that they have completed two rounds of image and definition matches, ask students in which round they were able to find a description for each image more quickly. Why?

Display **slide 9** to show the definitions from Card Match Set 1 and the corresponding word. Ask students if there were any words that they guessed based on the definition. Then pose the question: Is pizza epic?

Show **slide 10** to share with students the definition of the word epic. Point out that this term falls into the category of terms that we have come to use frequently in our language without understanding or considering their true definitions. The same case can be made for many other words with which students are familiar. Ask them to share other words that are used frequently and might be considered overused or misused. Write these words on the board.

Possible Responses

Responses might include *awesome, lit, literally, actually,* or *honestly.*

Teacher's Note: Informal Language Is Not All Bad

The use of informal language and phrases in our writing and speaking is part of our culture. Idioms, slang, understatements, and hyperbole help characterize language by region, time period, and groups of people. Language, though, often benefits from precision, and appropriate word choice helps articulate what a writer truly wants to say without resorting to overused, trendy, and often inaccurate phrases. Important in this lesson is to point out that it is natural for words and phrases to be overused in our language, largely due to popular culture, and we don't want to judge groups of people, casual settings, or regions for use of words or phrases that have fallen into colloquial use. Rather, the goal is to work toward forming vocabulary options that offer more precise meanings to help us communicate clearly.

Explain

Transition to **slide 11** and explain the need to communicate for the appropriate audience and purpose. Explain that hyperbole, slang, and idioms are appropriate when talking to friends and in casual conversation, but then ask for some examples of situations that students can think of where word choice needs to be precise.

Possible Responses

Student responses might include formal essays, letters requesting favors or funding, or job applications.

Pass out copies of the **Overused and Misused Words** handout. This handout lists several words with examples of when their use might be inaccurate and other word choice options to consider.

Review the first example (actually) as a class and holding a discussion about the following:

- Why does precision in word choice matter?
- For what audience would you be particularly careful about your word choice?
- For what purpose would you be particularly careful about your word choice?

Have students work in pairs or independently to review the next three examples and work toward an understanding of the "Consider That" and "Consider Using" columns.

After students have had 1-2 minutes to reflect on these commonly overused and misused words, display **slide 12**. Ask students to complete the back of the handout and identify four more examples of overused and/or misused words and phrases. For each word or phrase that they include, they should explain the issue with the word choice in the "Consider That:" column and suggest alternatives to the word or phrase in the "Consider Using:" column.

Words to Consider

Examples of other words that students might consider include *fantastic, honestly, irregardless, literally, unbelievable,* and *nice.*

Teacher's Note: Exploring Figurative Language

This lesson does not introduce or have students practice distinguishing the differences between hyperbole, understatement, idiom, or other forms of figurative language. Consider the lesson It's Raining Whats and Whats? for practice with colloquial language.

Extend

Transition to the CER activity by displaying **slide 13**. In this activity, students are asked to justify their thinking by establishing a claim, evidence, and reasoning.

Assign students a number from 1–8 to determine which word from their Overused and Misused Words handout they will focus on. (Or assign numbers from 5–8 to include only the students' examples.) As an alternative, if you are looking for a way to ensure that your students can share their examples in an orderly fashion without feeling self-conscious about their responses, consider trying the Airplane Landing strategy.

Pass out copies of the **CER handout**, and ask students to complete the following:

- Write a claim about why the word or phrase should be reconsidered due to overuse or misuse.
- Back up the claim with evidence (from the "Consider That" and "Consider Using" columns).
- Support the evidence with reasoning. (Why do the alternatives for this word or phrase more appropriately suit a particular purpose or audience?)

Ask students to share their CER responses in small groups or in a whole-class discussion.

Sample Response

An example of how students might format their CER is: "The word 'epic' should be reconsidered in our word choice because it has been misused frequently in recent popular culture. An epic can refer to a work of heroic poetry or something that is way beyond ordinary, but people today use the word epic to refer to something that impresses them. If we use a more context-specific word, like 'fragrant' to describe a flower or 'savory' to describe a pizza, then a more accurate meaning is communicated. This is especially important in something like a persuasive essay to an audience who we want to clearly understand what we're trying to say.

Evaluate

Show **slide 14** and introduce the Yes, Because ... strategy. Have students line up in two even rows facing each other, so that each participant is facing a partner in the opposite row. Start with the pair of students at the beginning of the line. Students hold their completed Overused and Misused Words handouts. One participant in the pair speaks, and then the other responds. The dialogue should sound something like this:

Partner 1: "The word 'amazing' should be reconsidered in word choice."

Partner 2: "Yes, because it is overused. We could use a more specific word that fits the situation better."

After one pair of students is done, the next pair of students facing each other in the line continues with a new example from the handout. Examples can be repeated as new evidence or reasoning is introduced.

The Yes, Because ... activity and the optional discussion serve as formative evaluation for this lesson.

Optional Activity: Concluding Discussion

Engaging in a concluding discussion is an opportunity to further gauge the knowledge your students have acquired over the course of this lesson. Ask students the following questions: 1) "What did you learn today that surprised you the most?" 2) "Are there any words or phrases you'll stop using or try to use differently?" 3) "Do you think the meanings of words such as "epic" and "awesome" will change again over time?" 4) "Do you think it is important for us to use words according to their original definitions?"

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Airplane landing. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/78
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Card matching. Strategies. Retrieved from https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/1837
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Claim, evidence, reasoning (CER). Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/156
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Yes, because ... Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/193
- Petras, R. & Petras, K. (2018). That doesn't mean what you think it means: The 150 most commonly misused words and their tangled histories. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press
- Pinker, S. (2014). The sense of style: The thinking person's guide to writing in the 21st century. New York: Penguin Books
- Stillman, J. (2015, December 14). 20 words you've been butchering for years. Inc. https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/the-20-most-abused-words-in-the-english-language.html