

Lost in Translation: Intent vs. Impact

Often times when we have trouble communicating with others it is because what we say isn't what they hear. It is important to learn strategies that help clear up disagreements that begin when the intent of our words is different from their impact.

SEL COMPETENCIES

Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

SKILLS communication, respect for others, empathy, resolving conflicts

MATERIALS

- ✓ Discovering Projectable 3.2.1
- ✓ Connecting Projectable 3.2.2
- ✓ Reflecting Projectable 3.2.3
- ✓ Student Handout: Practicing
- ✓ Student Handout: Applying
- ✓ Family Connection Worksheet

CLASSROOM CONFIGURATION

- D** whole class **C** whole class
P pairs **A** individuals

OBJECTIVES

Students will

- ✓ recognize the effect of intent vs. impact in healthy communication;
- ✓ practice strategies that help resolve misunderstandings, promote empathy, and build relationships.

SKILLS Progression

LAST YEAR, students used What, When, Why, and How Messages to constructively communicate their emotions.

THIS YEAR, understand how intent vs. the impact affects interpersonal communication.

NEXT YEAR, students will learn how to break down the barriers created by ethnocentrism and stereotyping to communicate with others and build relationships.

D DISCOVERING

8 MINUTES

Lesson Link

INSTRUCTION

SAY: *How many times this month have you had a disagreement with someone, because the other person took something you said “the wrong way”?*

Encourage the students to respond and, if appropriate, share some examples. Display **Discovery Projectable 3.2.1**.

SAY: *This is because the intent of our words, is often different from their impact.*

Review the projectable, which helps students understand that it's easy for misunderstanding to happen and for bad feelings to result for reasons involving both the sender and receiver.

Other factors involved in miscommunication might be interpretation of the meaning of a word, misunderstood words, or someone might just be having a bad day.

3.2.1
DISCOVERING | **Intent vs. Impact**

Sender	Receiver
Verbal What I said, filtered through my cultural experiences.	Verbal What I heard and saw (nonverbal), filtered through my cultural experiences.
Nonverbal Body language and intonation.	Nonverbal Body language and intonation.

What does it mean by “cultural experiences”? How do our cultural experiences affect what we hear?
 How might your body language and intonation lead to misunderstanding?
 What other factors might be involved with miscommunication?

C CONNECTING

10 MINUTES

INSTRUCTION

Unpacking the nature of the disagreement

Tell students that when disagreements happen and people get their feelings hurt, it's important to recognize when it's because what the speaker communicated had a different impact on the receiver than the speaker intended. Once that has been recognized the speaker and receiver can begin to “unpack” the nature of the disagreement.

SAY: *Similar to unpacking a suitcase, this process organizes otherwise disorderly items, such as intents and impacts, and organizes them so that they can be understood. The result of this process is that both people understand the other's point-of-view.*

Show **Connecting Projectable 3.2.2** and review the strategies for unpacking a misunderstanding.

3.2.2
CONNECTING | **Intent vs. Impact**

Intent: the idea the sender wants to communicate	Strategies for Unpacking a Misunderstanding
Impact: what the receiver takes in, what is heard (filtered through both peoples cultural experiences)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. asking questions 2. give the benefit of the doubt—don't assume the worst 3. allowing the sender to explain their intent 4. listening with an open mind, and ability to set aside one's own viewpoint temporarily 5. admitting your own mistakes 6. apologizing if you are wrong

Model unpacking a misunderstanding

Model how to unpack a misunderstanding by using the following scenario or create your own example using something from your life or something you've observed in your school or neighborhood.

Read the dialogue and discuss the following question.

ASK QUESTIONS. D: *"What's wrong? You've been ignoring me since yesterday. Did I do something wrong?"*

K: *"Yesterday in history class, during our group discussion you talked all over me and did not give the opportunity for me to finish what I wanted to say. I felt stupid, it was like I couldn't answer the questions without your help."*

ALLOW THE SPEAKER TO EXPLAIN HIS/HER INTENT. D: *"I really just wanted to help, you seemed nervous, and I thought I knew what you were trying to say, but I never thought you couldn't do it."*

K: *"I know we're friends and you might think you were trying to help, but next time just let me say what I'm trying to say. If I need your help I'll let you know."*

LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND. D: *"I understand, I got nervous when you hesitated and took a while to respond, so I jumped in. But I realize I was wrong and how my actions affected you."*

APOLOGIZE IF YOU'RE WRONG. D: *"I'm sorry, I apologize. I didn't mean to make you feel bad."*

ASK: *The point of unpacking skills is to make the intent and impact match. How do you think unpacking a misunderstanding can improve communications between two people? How does unpacking show respect?*

P PRACTICING 20 MINUTES

ACTIVITY 1

Divide the class into pairs. Distribute **Student Handout: Practicing**. Review the directions on the handout and give them about 10 minutes to develop their scenarios. Have volunteers share their work scenario with the class.

Reflecting

Display **Reflecting Project 3.2.3**. Students use their class notebooks to reflect individually and as a class on what they learned in this lesson.

What?	What is the difference between intent and impact?
So What?	What have you learned about how to communicate by studying intent and impact?
Now What?	How can you use your awareness of intent and impact as you react in a difficult situation?



Community Connection

Ask students to write a short narrative connecting the skills learned from this lesson to their neighborhood/community. Students should brainstorm reasons why misunderstandings/conflict occurs and how intent and impact can be misaligned between their neighbors and/or community members. Emphasize to students that their narratives should provide solutions and ways in which their communities can improve.



Family Connection

Have students use the Family Connection Worksheet to help a parent or sibling understand that many family misunderstandings occur because of the misalignment of intent vs. impact.



Applying Across the Curriculum

SOCIAL STUDIES Almost daily there are controversies in the news that result when a public figure says, writes, or texts something they feel is interpreted the wrong way. Many of these intent vs. impact issues involve race and gender. Have students use the internet to find recent hi-profile examples and write a short summary that examines the controversy.

LANGUAGE ARTS Have students watch a movie or television program and write about a misunderstanding between two or more characters involving intent vs. impact.

Practicing Resource: Student Handout

32 **PRACTICING**

Misunderstanding!
To practice unpacking a misunderstanding you and your partner will create a short scenario about a misunderstanding that results when intent and impact do not align. Think of a misunderstanding that might occur using one of the categories below, or come up with your own.

Categories: Circle your chosen category.

sports team	class project	family	school organization
band or musical group	friendship/relationship	teacher-student	

1 WHAT IS THE SCENARIO? THINK OF A SIMPLE CONVERSATION THAT STARTS OFF INNOCENTLY BUT IS MISUNDERSTOOD AND ESCALATES A SITUATION.

2 NOW WRITE A SHORT DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO CHARACTERS MEETING TO RESOLVE THE MISUNDERSTANDING AND STAGE THE "CLIFF" IN FRONT OF THE CLASS. USE THE STRATEGIES FOR UNPACKING MISUNDERSTANDINGS FROM TODAY'S LESSON.

Applying Resource: Student Handout

32 **APPLYING**

Pay attention to your interactions with people outside of class during the next week. When you experience a disagreement with someone that may be the result of a misunderstanding, unpack the misunderstanding to identify the conflict between impact and intent.

1 DESCRIBE THE SITUATION THAT RESULTED IN A DISAGREEMENT. WHAT WAS YOUR INTENT? WHAT WAS THE IMPACT ON THE OTHER PERSON?

2 HOW DID YOU UNPACK THE MISUNDERSTANDING? WHAT QUESTIONS DID YOU ASK? HOW DID THE OTHER PERSON EXPLAIN HIS/HER INTENT? WERE YOU ABLE TO LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND? WHY OR WHY NOT?

3 HOW DID UNPACKING THE MISUNDERSTANDING HELP YOU RESOLVE THE MISUNDERSTANDING?

A APPLYING 5 MINUTES

Have students use the **Student Handout: Applying** either as written homework, as a follow-up activity to support the lesson, or as a verbal discussion in a future lesson after students have applied the skill of unpacking a misunderstanding.

ASSESSING

PRACTICING (INFORMAL FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT) As students complete the Practicing Activity assess how well they used the Strategies for Unpacking a Misunderstanding in the scenario.

APPLYING (FORMAL FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT) Review responses to the Reflecting Projectable to assess how well student completed the lesson objectives.

BUILDING SKILLS BEYOND THE LESSON

Play It!

REINFORCEMENT

PRACTICING Have students spend a few minutes writing on scratch paper about a situation that involved them in something they said (innocently) taken the wrong way. Divide students into small groups. Collect the slips and ask for each group to select one and read it aloud. Allow students in their groups to spend a few moments identifying the impact/intent as well as provide action steps to resolve conflict in a respectful and meaningful way. Invite groups to share with the class their responses. Have students vote which group had the best resolution.

Design It!

APPLYING Tell students to create a logo for a national campaign promoting, "Think Before You Speak." Students' designs may be created by hand or using the computer.

Write It!

ENRICHMENT

PRACTICING Have students create various scenarios along with a summary of their reactions and feelings (fiction or nonfiction) about an experience they encountered when positive intentions resulted in a negative impact. Invite students to share their stories with the class.

Think Deep!

APPLYING Using the quote from Stephen Covey as a starting point, "We judge ourselves by our intentions (intent) and others by their behavior (impact)," have students write a short essay that examines the question—How would our lives be different if we judged ourselves by our impact, and others by their intent?