



## Resources:

*Free Speech, A Very Short Introduction:* Nigel Warburton.

*You Can't Read This Book:* Nick Cohen.

*Non-violent Communication, A Language of Life:* Marshall Rosenberg.

## SESSION 1: Drawing you in.

The principal image for this lesson is that of the sieve/sifting from the quote on the first slide: 'The wise ones fashioned speech with their thought, sifting it as grain is sifted through a sieve', which is attributed to the Buddha. Speaking/communicating can be done virtuously or viciously and this unit of lessons aims to help students reflect on and develop ways of speaking/communicating virtuously. The unit also explores ideas of censorship and pornography.

### 1. Do we need sieves?

- \* Ask students to briefly note down the different media of communication that we have as human beings (e.g. speech, written word, electronic etc.)
- \* Ask students to imagine a world in which there are no limits on freedom of speech: where we can say, write or communicate whatever we want (to use the image from the quote, where there is no sifting, no sieve). What would that world be like? Are there some forms of communication where we effectively already have freedom of speech?
- \* Ask students to identify what limits (if any) should be imposed on the forms of communication that they have identified. Why should limits be imposed? There are some suggested examples on the slides to stimulate discussion.
- \* Introduce students to the difference between liberty and licence. There is a quote from Alexander Meiklejohn on the slides to stimulate discussion about it and there are some questions about his quote which aim to tease out the difference between liberty and licence and get students thinking about the importance of being self-governing when being given the right to free speech.

### 2. Virtues as sieves.

- \* Alexander Meiklejohn's quote has introduced the idea that freedom of speech is not licence to say anything and it depends for its success on people being self-governing. This second part of the lesson looks at how the virtues might act as sieves for speech.
- \* Split the class into 7 groups. Give each group one of the virtues (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility). Each group should do the following:
  - \* Think of someone they know (famous or not) who speaks according to their virtue (e.g. Martin Luther King could be an icon of honesty or justice).
  - \* Ask the group to identify, using their 'icon,' what it means to speak according to that virtue (e.g. what actually makes for courageous speech?)
  - \* Ask the group to take a form of communication and apply their virtue to it. For example, what would Twitter be like if everyone who used it was compassionate?
- \* Bring the groups together and ask them to present their conclusions. Discuss how the virtues can act as sieves for speech.

### 3. Sifted freedom.

If we could guarantee that speech could be sifted by self-governing persons, what would be the benefits to any society of the freedom to express our opinions? There are some resources online to help explain the importance of freedom of expression online.





## SESSION 2: Right Speech and Moral Virtues: Speech and Harm.

### 1. Harmful and offensive speech.

- \* The old saying ‘sticks and stones...’ suggests that words cannot hurt us. Do the students agree? Are there different types of harm that can be caused by words, other than physical harm? A possible stimulus for this is the tragic story of Amanda Todd, who experienced harmful speech directed at her and published a video of her story on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOHXGNx-E7E> [available 02/15].
- \* Some speech unambiguously intends offence. Ask students to give examples of speech they consider to be intentionally offensive or harmful.
- \* Ask students to take a few examples of offensive or harmful speech and identify specifically how that speech causes offence or harm.
- \* Introduce students to John Stuart Mill’s harm principle. He did not think that this principle extended to economic harm or psychological harm. An issue to hang this idea on is the prevalence of Internet trolls: many of them use hate speech, but don’t actually threaten violence. Under Mill’s criteria, we should allow Internet trolls. There is a BBC documentary clip on YouTube of a journalist tracking down an Internet troll: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kFNYuteAjA> [available 02/15].  
What do the students think about this? Should trolls be silenced and prevented from using the Internet because of the harm they cause? Does Mill’s harm principle go far enough?

### 2. Types of offence: misogynistic speech.

- \* Share the definition/explanation of ‘misogyny’ with the students.
- \* Ask students for examples of misogynistic speech

that they have heard. You could add in examples from popular culture: the Pharrell Williams song ‘*blurred lines*’ has caused controversy, both because of some of its lyrics and the video of the song.

Ask students to identify the specific harm that misogynistic speech might do.

- \* **Case study: Mary Beard.** In 2013 the academic, Mary Beard, appeared on Question Time. During and after her appearance there was a stream of offensive posts about her on Twitter. There is an article about it here: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/21/mary-beard-suffers-twitter-abuse> and a YouTube video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W90-NP8rm7I> [both available 02/15].
- \* Ask students to identify any harm that was caused by the comments directed at Mary Beard. Were the comments misogynistic? Why? Were the comments immoral? Why? What (if anything) should be done about comments such as these?

### 3. Types of offence: homophobic speech.

- \* Ask students to discuss whether expressions such as ‘that’s so gay’ might be considered harmful or offensive. If they are, what is the specific harm being caused?
- \* Show students the website [www.nohomophobes.com](http://www.nohomophobes.com) [available 02/15], which counts in real time, on a daily basis the number of Tweets that use homophobic language: specifically 4 words. It also shows who has posted those tweets.  
N.B. some of the Tweets are very offensive, or use language that might not be appropriate for your class.
- \* Is any use of words like ‘gay’, ‘faggott’, ‘homo’, ‘queer’ offensive? How do we determine when the use of those words is harmful or offensive?





#### 4. Back to sticks and stones.

- \* Looking back at their initial responses about ‘sticks and stones’, have any of them changed their mind since exploring specific examples of harmful or offensive speech?
- \* In terms of the main virtues (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility), what would the attitude of a person who displays these virtues be towards speech that is either harmful or offensive?

### SESSION 3: Right Speech and Performance Virtues: countering bad speech with good speech.

#### 1. Bad speech should be suppressed...

- \* Present students with the assertion that false/offensive speech should be suppressed. There are some examples on the slides to illustrate this.

#### 2. When speech leads to conflict.

- \* Suggest to students that there are at least two ways that the speech of others may lead to conflict:
  1. When it causes harm or is hostile and
  2. When it expresses ideas that we disagree with.
- \* Provide students with examples of both: there are plenty to choose from on Youtube. Some examples might be speeches given by Abubakr Shekau, the leader of the Boko Haram movement that abducted 300 Nigerian schoolgirls in 2014 (CNN has posted videos of this). Another example is the English Defence League (EDL) or on a more trivial level, Katie Hopkins who expresses some controversial opinions about childrens’ names on a ‘This Morning’ segment (also on YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fKkMlPpjSA> [available 02/15].
- \* Ask students to note their responses to these examples. They should note what they think and how they feel (picked up in part 5).
- \* Discuss the students’ responses.

#### 3. How should we respond to speech we disagree with, or that is offensive?

- \* Ask students for initial ideas on how we should respond to speech we disagree with, or that is offensive.
- \* Show students the Alan Dershowitz quote on the slides. Do they agree with it? Should we allow people who express false or offensive opinions the freedom to express those opinions knowing that they will be challenged?

#### 4. Response 1: better speech (reasoned argument).

- \* There is a quote from Nigel Warburton’s very short introduction to free speech on the slides which explains John Stuart Mill’s view on the necessity for better speech to counteract false or offensive speech.
- \* Introduce the students to the *10 tools for spotting a bad argument* (included as an endnote.)<sup>1</sup> A good text to use to try these tools out is *The Case for Banning Bread* also included as an endnote.<sup>2</sup>
- \* Ask students to go back to the example of false/offensive speech given earlier. Ask them to identify any thinking mistakes in the arguments made.
- \* **Feedback.** Does this technique solve our problem with false/offensive speech? How do we have to go about challenging the logic of a person’s argument to achieve resolution? Perhaps use this video clip of atheists mocking and deriding aspects of religious



belief as a case study: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea6w3zp-dYY> [available 02/15].

Is the issue of disagreement resolved through this approach? There is a slide with a quote from Oliver Kamm, which suggests that mockery and derision are powerful tools for challenging false/offensive speech: do students agree?

### 5. Response 2: empathy.<sup>3</sup>

- \* Return to the pupil responses to the false or offensive speech that they encountered earlier in the lesson. It's not unusual for our emotional reaction to false or offensive speech to be one of anger, fear, frustration, anxiety, antagonism, superciliousness and so on. Ask students to speculate on how we might respond to false/offensive speech if the emotion present in us is in the survival zone (high energy, negative energy, see emotions slate, lesson 2). What are the likely outcomes of responding to something we disagree with from a place of superiority ("I am right, you are wrong"), fear or anger?

- \* There is a very clear explanation of empathy by Brene Brown on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw> [available 02/15].
- \* Go back to the example of false/offensive speech. Ask students to put their judgements about the person they have looked at to one side and instead try to imagine/role play an empathic conversation with them which follows this pattern:
  - \* Listening non-judgmentally.
  - \* Describing what you have heard the person say.
  - \* Describing how you feel in response to what has been said.
  - \* Requesting a change.

### 6. Better speech, empathy and the virtues.

- \* Ask students to consider how the use of better speech or empathy might correspond to the virtues of Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude and Humility.

<sup>3</sup> A complete guide to communication of this sort can be found in *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg.

#### <sup>2</sup> THE CASE FOR BANNING BREAD.

1. More than 98 percent of convicted felons are bread users.
2. Fully HALF of all children who grow up in bread-consuming households score below average on standardised tests.
3. In the 18th century, when virtually all bread was baked in the home, the average life expectancy was less than 50 years; infant mortality rates were unacceptably high; many women died in childbirth; and diseases such as typhoid, yellow fever, and influenza ravaged whole nations.
4. More than 90% of violent crimes are committed within 24 hours of eating bread.
5. Bread is made from a substance called "dough". It has been proven that as little as one pound of dough can be used to suffocate a mouse. The average South African eats more than that in one month!
6. Primitive tribal societies that have no bread exhibit a low incidence of cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and osteoporosis.
7. Bread has been proven to be addictive. Subjects deprived of bread and given only water to eat begged for bread after as little as two days.
8. Bread is often a "gateway" food item, leading the user to "harder" substances such as butter, jelly, peanut butter, and even cold cuts.
9. Bread has been proven to absorb water. Since the human body is more than 90% water, it follows that eating bread could lead your body being taken over by this absorptive food product, turning you into a soggy, goey, bread-pudding person.
10. Newborn babies can choke on bread.
11. Bread is baked at temperatures as high as 400°C! That kind of heat can kill an adult in under a minute!





<sup>1</sup>BELOW IS A LIST OF THE TOP TEN THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID DOING IF YOU ARE TRYING TO PUT FORWARD A GOOD ARGUMENT.

EACH OF THE 10 THINGS BELOW UNDERMINES A GOOD ARGUMENT AND LEAVES IT OPEN TO CRITICISM.

**1. Assumption:** where you take something to be true or false without looking at the evidence. There is an old saying: 'never assume, it makes an ass out of you and me.' This is partly wrong: some assumptions make sense, such as the assumption that the sky won't cave in on us in the next 30 seconds (like Chicken Licken). Some assumptions are false though: for example that all poor people are stupid.

**2. Authority:** believing something to be true or false because someone with 'authority' told you. For example, trusting everything that teachers say without question might get you in to trouble if one day you have an evil teacher. Some people believe things on TV or in the newspapers because, well, they wouldn't lie would they?

**3. Bad Company Fallacy:** this is where you say something like "you can't use a swastika: Hitler used swastikas." You are arguing that something is bad because bad people have done it too. The problem with this is that bad people sometimes do good things: Hitler dramatically reduced unemployment and poverty in Germany as well as instigating atrocities.

**4. Black and White:** believing that there are only two options in a situation: it's either this or that. George W. Bush once famously said "You're either with us, or with the terrorists": what if you're neither with the Americans nor the terrorists?

**5. Circular Arguments:** this is an argument that doesn't take us anywhere. For example, someone might argue that there is a God because the Bible tells us so. You might then ask why we should trust the Bible, to which they might respond "the Bible is the word of God and has to be true." The argument has taken us nowhere as we are no closer to knowing whether or not God exists.

**6. Correlation - Cause Confusion:** where you mix up causes and correlations. For example, I could argue that vocabulary increases with shoe size and in fact, bigger shoes=bigger vocabulary. I am mixing up my cause and effect with my correlation. There is a correlation between big shoes and big vocabularies, because as we get older, our vocabularies increase. There is no cause there though.

**7. Rash Generalisation:** where you argue that something is true for everyone or in every situation. For example, it would be a rash generalisation to argue that all state school pupils are badly behaved and all public school pupils are perfectly behaved.

**8. Fencing Off:** Fencing-off is where you make a subject out of bounds: the old blasphemy laws in Britain did this and the Monty Python film 'The Life of Brian' was banned because its content was deemed to be blasphemous (offensive to religion). Some people might argue that you cannot question the truth of a holy book because it is the word of God. This is a philosophical mistake because it assumes that some pieces of knowledge are inherently more valuable than others, which is not the case without sound argument.

**9. Getting Personal:** where you reject someone's argument because of a piece of personal information. For example, I might argue to you that smoking is bad. If you know that I used to smoke, you could say "you can't argue that, because you used to smoke." If you used that argument, that would be a mistake because the anti-smoking argument might be a good one, regardless of whether or not I used to smoke.

**10. The Straw Man:** where you set up an argument to show that your opponent's position is ridiculous, where you caricature their argument. For example, Richard Dawkins, the famous atheist, made a documentary called The Root of All Evil in which he tried to argue that religion is the root of all evil. He interviewed two fundamentalists: one from Christianity and one from Islam, to try to show that all religious people hold false opinions. He committed the straw man mistake because he didn't destroy religion; he only destroyed a 'straw man' version of religion.



## SESSION 4: Right Speech and Civic Virtues: Pornography

### 1. Pornography and harm.

- \* Put up the slide with ‘pornography harms our society’ on it. Ask students to come up with reasons why this might be true and reasons why it might be false. You could use a values line for this exercise. Draw an imaginary line across the classroom, with one end representing ‘agree’ and the other end representing ‘disagree’, and ask students to stand on the point of the line that best reflects their position on the statement. You could then ask students for their opinion and then invite students to move if someone else’s argument changes their opinion.
- \* Suggest that pornography might be harmful for four main reasons: it changes our idea of a normal body image, it changes our idea of what is normal sexual behaviour, it changes our ideas of what to expect from a sexual relationship and it harms those who take part or are forced to take part in its production.
- \* Show students the ‘what is normal?’ slide. Ask them in small groups to discuss. (Consider whether to put them into single sex/mixed groups for the discussion).
- \* Discuss as a class. Try to help students develop a clear sense of what is normal and what is ‘pornification.’
- \* Revisit the opening statement about social harm: do these four suggestions in any way affect the students’ opinions on how harmful pornography is or on whom it might affect?

### 2. The debate about harm.

- \* There is a growing discussion about the potential harm caused by pornography, not only in terms of damage done to those who act or are forced to participate in it, but also to those who view it. The documentary *Porn on the Brain* contains some useful, short clips about the possible addictiveness of pornography. An alternative for exploring the possible impact of pornography on attitudes towards women and sexual relationships is the character Jay Cartwright from *The Inbetweeners*. There is a montage clip on YouTube which could be used to explore this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPKTEImbiks> [available 02/15].
- \* A lot has been written about the potential harm of pornography. There are various articles online arguing that it is harmful and various articles questioning the strength of the causal link between watching pornography and developing problematic attitudes to women, body image or sexuality.
- \* Ask students to engage with the arguments on the different sides of the debate about the harmfulness of pornography: to identify what they are and separate them out and see if they can come to a reasoned conclusion about whether or not pornography is harmful.

### 3. What can be done?

- \* With the virtues in mind (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility), what action do they think can and should be taken, by whom and in what way to minimise the harms that pornography causes?
- \* A possible case study is the work of Catharine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin to introduce legislation that allows people who have been harmed by pornography to seek redress.





## SESSION 5: Reflection: How has my speech changed?

### 1. How have things changed?

- \* Go back to the statement 'it's a free country, we can say what we want.' Ask the class what they think about this statement now, what their reasons are for thinking this and what (if anything) has changed. You could do this by means of a value line and ask students to stand where they were at the start of the 5 lessons and move to where they are now.

### 2. Making changes.

- \* Ask students to think carefully about how they would like to improve their ability to sift their speech: thinking back over previous lessons, what would they like to do better? (Avoid speech that harms or offends, challenge speech in others that harms or offends, be more skilful or virtuous when posting comments online, be better at challenging false or offensive speech with reasoned argument, or at meeting it with compassion or empathy).
- \* Ask students to plan how they are going to do this. They might consider buddying up with another pupil and coming to an agreement about what they are going to change, how and when.

### 3. Using virtue to make changes.

- \* For each of the virtues (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility) ask students to imagine what that virtue looks like when enacted, in terms of developing good speech (e.g. the compassion required to speak kindly; self-discipline to bite one's tongue; humility to accept that we have spoken poorly; gratitude for those who speak well of us or things we care about).
- \* Ask students to think of icons of good speech and also to think of which virtues they employ to develop it.