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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Grades: 6 and up

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Posters with expressions on them (see below); black/white board and chalk/markers

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science

Preparation: Create posters with common phrases used to insult people that use animal names in the insult (leave out the animal names). For example:

- Stop eating so much! You're such a _____ (pig).
- He's scared of everything. He's just a _____ (chicken).
- Don't grab all that stuff yourself. You're being a _____ (hog).
- You told on me. You're a _____ (rat).
- That ugly girl?! She's a _____ (dog).
- She's fat. What a _____ (cow).
- She's stupid, a real _____ (birdbrain).
- She's hardly touched her food. She eats like a _____ (bird).

1. Show students the phrases and challenge them to complete the phrase.

2. Discuss the phrases and note that girls and women are more often the object of insults when we use animal metaphors. Ask the class why they think this is the case. Then ask who else is being insulted when we use such phrases -- the animals. When we use this language, whom do we think we're insulting? Before you raised this question, were students even aware that they were also insulting animals?

3. Ask students to list other phrases they've heard that include animal references (such as "There's no use beating a dead horse." or to "kill two birds with one stone" or "There's more than one way to skin a cat.")

4. Have them reflect on the violence or negativity inherent in these phrases.

5. Dispel the myths and images about these animals. (For reference and background, check out *When Elephants Weep* and *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* by Jeffrey Masson. For example, birds eat an enormous amount of food for their body weight,

while pigs have been *bred* to be huge so that we can have more meat when we slaughter them. Hens will protect their chicks from predators, thus displaying courage, and so on.)

6. Discuss our prejudices against animals. Why do we accord some animals special protections (dogs, cats, and “pet” birds, for example), while depriving equally sentient animals (such as pigs, cows, and chickens) of even minimal protections from cruelty? Ask students what the difference is between a pig and dog or a cow and a cat in terms of their ability to suffer and feel pain. Should we treat all nonhuman animals who are capable of suffering equally? Should they be accorded the same protections from harm as humans? Why or why not?

7. Ask students to consider words and phrases they can use to communicate without insulting anyone or condoning violence. Invite them to share their ideas.

Extension: Have students create new phrases that reflect positive messages and that remove the negative animal references.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education* and from Liberty Mulkani (M.Ed. Student)