

Activity 3

“Precision of language, please!” Language and Control

In *The Giver*, “precision of language” is very important for the well-being of the community. This activity will help your students explore the implications of this phrase and its role in the story.

Class Discussion:

Read aloud the excerpt from *The Giver* at the right and invite your students to discuss the following:

- Why does Jonas’s mother choose to use the words *function* and *smoothly* when she says, “Our community can’t function smoothly if people don’t use precise language”? What words didn’t she use here? Why? How would the meaning of her statement change if she used different words?
- Why is it important to the community that the word *love* has become “almost obsolete”? Why do you think the word *love* still exists in the community if there is no need for it?
- Why does Jonas tell his first lie in this moment? What does Jonas realize about his parents?

Define the word *euphemism* as a class and then discuss what each of the following euphemisms found in *The Giver* stands for:

RELEASE	COMFORT OBJECT
NURTURERS	LOSS
NEWCHILDREN	REPLACEMENT
DWELLING	ELSEWHERE
BIRTHMOTHERS	

“Do you love me?”

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle. “Jonas. You, of all people. Precision of language, please!”

“What do you mean?” Jonas asked. Amusement was not at all what he had anticipated.

“Your father means that you have used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it’s become almost obsolete,” his mother explained carefully.

Jonas stared at them. Meaningless? He had never before felt anything as meaningful as the memory [of love he’d received from the Giver].

“And of course, our community can’t function smoothly if people don’t use precise language. You could ask, ‘Do you enjoy me?’ The answer is, ‘Yes,’” his mother said.

“Or,” his father suggested. “‘Do you take pride in my accomplishments?’ And the answer is wholeheartedly ‘Yes.’”

“Do you understand why it’s inappropriate to use a word like ‘love’?” Mother asked.

Jonas nodded. “Yes, thank you, I do,” he replied slowly.

It was his first lie to his parents.

(FROM *THE GIVER*: HARDCOVER EDITION, CHAPTER 16, PAGES 159–160)

Class Activity:

Once each of the words is identified, ask students to think about and then share their thoughts on the following questions:

- Is using a euphemism in place of another word actually precise?
- If “precision of language” is vital to the community, why do the members of the community use so many euphemisms in everyday conversation?

euphemism noun

A polite expression used in place of words or phrases that might be considered harsh, unkind, or unpleasant to hear. Euphemism has also been described as “the language of avoidance.”

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