

Polite Language for Sensitive Topics **Teacher's Notes**

Objective:	Learn to use euphemisms for sensitive conversation topics in American English.
Can do:	At the end of the lesson, students can use common euphemisms in place of harsher-sounding words in polite conversations about uncomfortable topics.

Suggested activity times are approximate

Introduce the topic

Ask students about the images at the top of the page to introduce the topic.

- *Ask: When and why do we use this emoji? Have you felt this way recently? How does each person feel? Why might they feel that way?*
- *Illicit language in this lesson and check understanding of key words: **polite, sensitive, awkward, embarrassing, uncomfortable***
- *Ask students for examples of polite language*

*Optional: Write a list of words on the board and make note of prefixes for negative adjectives (e.g. **impolite, insensitive, uncomfortable, disrespectful**)*

WARM-UP (10 minutes)

Instruct students to consider the topics and rank them from 1-5 (1 = most awkward, 5 = least awkward). Then, they will compare their answers with a partner. Monitor the class and assist with unknown vocabulary. Encourage a short discussion. Check understanding and ask a few volunteers to share their responses and opinions.

Note: As the theme of this lesson is sensitivity and awkward topics, encourage discussion and participation but make sure that no one feels pressured to share anything that feels embarrassing.

PRE-READING (5 minutes)

1. Instruct students to skim conversation 1 and try matching the bolded words and phrases 1-9 to their meanings A-I.
2. Instruct students to skim conversation 2 and check their answers.

Vocabulary Answers

Conversation A

1. between jobs
2. let go
3. creative differences
4. passed away
5. over the hill
6. expecting
7. heavier
8. restroom
9. adult beverages

Conversation B

1. unemployed
2. fired/terminated
3. opposing ideas and disagreements
4. died
5. old
6. pregnant
7. fatter
8. toilet
9. alcohol

READING (10 minutes)

Instruct students to work in pairs and read conversations 1 and 2 aloud together. Monitor the class and assist with pronunciation. When all students are finished, ask volunteers to perform the dialogues aloud for the class. Check understanding and demonstrate pronunciation of new or unknown words. Review the meanings of any unknown words.

Ask students: Which conversation uses language that sounds more direct? Which sounds more indirect? Why might we sometimes use more indirect language?

Explain the use and purpose of euphemisms.

Euphemisms are words or phrases that people use to express something unpleasant, uncomfortable, or sensitive in a more gentle or indirect way. Euphemisms sometimes make embarrassing or awkward topics more acceptable. This kind of polite indirect language is very common in English, especially in American culture.

Note: Some words like “toilet” might not seem offensive, but are not commonly used in the US. Americans use words like *restroom* or *bathroom* to talk about the room and *toilet* for the chairlike item in the room.

Practice

(Part 1: 10 minutes) Instruct students to complete the questions with the highlighted euphemisms from conversation 1. Students can work individually or with a partner. Review the answers.

1. adult beverages, 2. expecting, 3. let go, 4. restroom, 5. over the hill, 6. passed away, 7. between jobs, 8. heavy, 9. creative differences

(Part 2: 10 minutes) Instruct students to ask and answer the completed questions with a partner. Remind them to speak in complete sentences and to add details and examples to expand on their responses.

Monitor each pair’s conversation. Listen for interesting responses and invite a few students to share their answers with the class.

ROLEPLAY (20 minutes)

Instruct students to work in pairs and choose from situations 1-4. Tell each pair to decide who will be Speaker A and who will be Speaker B (You might decide to assign students their topics and roles). Allow students some time to prepare and explain that they will have to imagine some of the details of their roleplay. Monitor each pair for about ten minutes while they prepare. Ask students to include appropriate euphemisms from this lesson (you might instruct them to use a certain number of euphemisms). Encourage students to improvise and be creative.

As time allows, students can perform their roleplays for another group or for the class while their classmates listen and make note of the euphemisms they hear from the lesson.

Extension/Homework

Instruct students to choose one of the roleplay situations (1-4) and write a dialogue between speakers A and B with 5 euphemisms from this lesson.