The Harmful Phrase: "That's so gay"

Pre-Reading Reflection

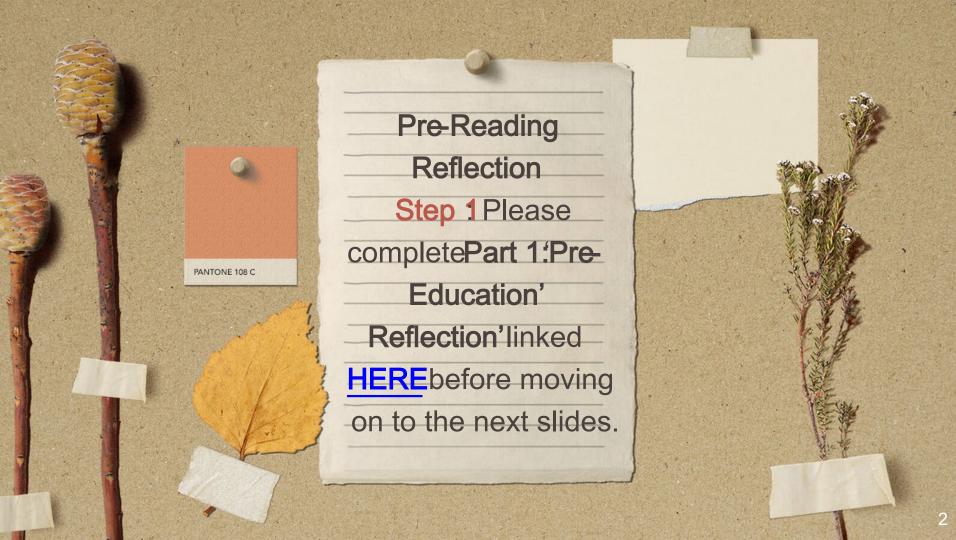Step 1 Please complete Part 1: 'Pre-Education' Reflection' linked HERE before moving on to the next slides.

PANTONE 108 C

2

Language Has Power

Language has the power to reinforce systems of bias and discrimination as well as to challenge those systems . Because we use language every day, it has the power to "casually" reinforce bias without us being aware of it . The phrase "that's so gay" is one way in which language sends harmful messages about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning .

Careful with words —
they are so meaningful.
--Josh Rouse

History of the Word "Gay"

The word "gay" dates to the twelfth century and was used for centuries to mean "full of joy, carefree and lighthearted." Because language is created by people, the meanings of words often evolve and change over time. In the 1600s, "gay" became associated with overindulging in personal desires and passions. In 1951, "gay" appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary for the first time as a slang term defining people attracted to people of the same sex. While the dictionary acknowledged yet another shift in the definition of the word, "gay" began to be used by members of the LGBTQ+ community in the 1920s. As members of the LGBTQ+ community fought for equal rights, including the right to openly identify as gay, the word's definition became solidified.

Listen to Students

Harmful Phrase

The harmful phrase "that's so gay" began to be used in the 1990s as a replacement for words like "stupid," "undesirable," "disgusting" or "uncool ." The phrase is frequently heard when referring to things that have nothing to do with romantic attraction or sexual orientation . This use of the phrase communicates that "gay" equals "stupid" or "bad ." As a result, "that's so gay" carries with it a history of negative judgment and rigid ideas about who or what is acceptable .

Hiding to be Safe

While some people might dismiss the seriousness of this phrase as something "people just say," it's important to acknowledge a larger context of mistreatment and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. In many communities and families in the U.S., people who are LGBTQ+ are forced to hide their identities in order to be physically and psychologically safe. LGBTQ+ youth represent almost 40 percent of homeless youth in the U.S. due to family rejection and are much more likely report high levels of depression.

What more is there to say about LGBTQ issues?

The Impact

The short - and long - term impact of a phrase like "that's so gay" is harmful whether LGBTQ+ people are present to hear that language or not. According to GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey, almost all of LGBTQ students (98.5%) had heard "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") at school, and 91.8 percent reported feeling distressed because of this language. In a world that continues to reject and harm people simply because of who they are, it is critical that we find better, more accurate and inclusive language to describe things we don't like.

5 Tips for Being an Ally

Post-Reading Reflection

Step 3 Please complete **Part 3: 'Follow Up Questions'** return to same link: [HERE](#) to complete today's work.