

Power of one word

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A single word can be used to belittle, hurt, and humiliate. One word can cause so much hurt to a person that they burst into tears or spiral down into a damaging hole that they can't get out of for an extended amount of time. Throughout history, names have been used to keep a population in its place. Insults have been hurled to make a single person understand what another thinks of them. Words are used all the time to cause damage to a person or an entire people's soul. One word can have a lot of power. In "What's in a Name?", Henry Louis Gates' father was a well-respected negro in his community.

Maybe the better way to put it is more respected. He worked two jobs, and being more financially successful elevated the family's status. The Gates family was the only negro allowed into a local drugstore to actually sit down and eat. On one occasion, Mr. Gates and his father went in together for ice cream and his father greeted a white man. The white man, Mr. Wilson, responded, but called his father "George". George was a disparaging name for black men. Mr. Gates asked his dad to correct the Mr. Wilson, thinking it had been a mistake. When he realized that Mr.

Wilson had deliberately insulted his father, it changed something in him forever. I believe Mr. Gates could not comprehend Mr. Wilson acknowledging and belittling his father at the same time. Why did he say anything back at all? Why would he be rude on purpose? Mr. Gates, up until that moment, had believed that Mr. Wilson was a nice person. After Mr. Gates' father explained that he called every black man George, his opinion shifted. The white man insulted every black man he knew. This was the first time Mr. Gates could see that people were not always who they seemed.

He was confused about why his father did not correct Mr. Wilson. Surely his father must have been insulted. He must have understood that Mr. Wilson meant to insult him. I believe he became embarrassed for his father and wanted him to correct Mr. Wilson, to stand up for himself. His mother called it “ just one of those things” (Gates 6), and he was upset that they accepted that. It was painful that they had so many of those moments. He wanted his father to change something, to correct the wrong. Accepting it was painful and shameful. He wrote that he could never look Mr.

Wilson in the eye again. One word, “ George”, made a little boy see clearly a white man, his black father, their positions in society, and the injustice that society tolerated. It changed his view of the world and of his family forever. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, a black man, Jefferson, is sentenced to be electrocuted for a murder that he did not commit. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time with a couple of boys he had known his whole life, and they were trouble. They robbed a liquor store that was owned by a white man, and during the robbery the white man was killed.

A black man at the scene of the crime never stood any chance of not being convicted. When the sentencing part of his trial came up, his lawyer tried to get him out of a death sentence. The lawyer claimed that he was the equivalent of a hog. “ I ask you, I implore, look carefully- do you see a man sitting here? ” (7; pt. 3, ch. 1)... “ What justice would there be to take this life? Justice gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in electric chair as this. ” (8; pt. 4, ch. 1) Jefferson and his godmother, Aunt Emma, are both deeply affected by the word hog.

She calls on a family friend, Grant, to help Jefferson learn to be a man. She says, “ I don't want them to kill no hog” and “ I want a man to go to that chair, on his own two feet. ” (13; pt. 2, ch. 2) She wants him to die with dignity. The first time they see him after the court date, Jefferson has taken being a hog to heart. He's so hurt that he snuffles and makes hog noises, saying that dignity is for “ youmans” (83; pt. 8, ch. 11) and they should only be bringing certain foods that hogs eat, since he was a hog. Grant has no idea how to teach dignity to a man, but over time they start to communicate.

They talk about ice cream, which Jefferson wants for his last meal, and Grant brings him a radio. This reminds Jefferson of his humanity, and he thinks maybe Grant is trying to do him some good. Grant had been struggling with his own demons since he came back to his hometown after college. He no longer believes in God and is bitter and beat down by the way black people are treated. He separates himself from his community because he thinks that he no longer belongs. He thinks that his family and friends don't understand how white people keep them all in their place, and that they are weak because they just accept it.

He never wanted to help Jefferson and thought he would never be able to make a difference. Breaking through to Jefferson makes him realize that as much as he hates the way life is in their small town, he does belong. He is a part of it and the people. He can finally understand what Jefferson's aunt wanted him to do, and explains to Jefferson that he can die a man, that Jefferson can go to the chair with so much dignity that he strengthens the whole community. They all owe something to each other, and like it or not, they should all be trying to help each other out.

Jefferson realizes that since he loves his aunt he should learn to “ be a man” so she can have peace when he dies. When he finally goes to the chair, he is a man. He dies with dignity and leaves his mark behind. White men know deep in their hearts that his punishment was unjust. He starts a slow change in certain people in that town. Jefferson left behind more than he had brought with him to the world. One word, “ hog” changed two men forever. Jefferson found himself and became something for the people to look up to. Grant realized that he was not better than everyone else, and began wanting to make his world a better place.

The word hog took Jefferson down so low that he believed he should be eating slop off the floor and that they should just hurry up and slaughter him. When his time finally came, he was calm and understood that he could actually use this to do some good. He was a man. Females can be horrible to each other. They can be vicious and sneaky, and sometimes that is most evident in sororities. Sororities have intense and sometimes demeaning tasks and initiations to become a member. The older girls will tell their pledges that they are losers, fat, or stupid.

There is one word that seems to be thrown out more often than not, and it should be a word that women don't use against each other, “ bitch”. The girls that pledge to sororities are looking for somewhere to belong when they get to a new school and are away from home for the first time. In a lot of cases, instead of being welcomed and introduced to their new school in a friendly way, they are put through hazing and degrading situations. In Pledged, one of the initiations was putting the new girls in blind folds, stripping them down and laying them face down on the floor.

Boys from a fraternity were then free to move around the room with markers and mark on the girls. The boys would highlight the areas on their bodies that the new girls needed to work on. (Robbins 259-260) Others sororities have branded their new girls with lit cigarettes or metal brands after encouraging the girls to drink heavily and then stripping them down without their consent. (Robbins 258-259) Any girls who objected to this treatment, however, would be called a bitch and kicked out. Women should not be treating each other this way.

It is hard to understand that sororities, which should be lifting their members up, would want to subject their members to even worse treatment than what they already saw at home, in the outside world. They put each other down and are constantly telling them how to do their hair, how to dress, how much to weigh, and how to act. The whole time they are doing this, however, they are telling the new girls that they are not good enough, and probably won't be able to meet those standards. They are told that all of this is to help improve themselves and it's all for the greater good.

If a girl decides to stand up for herself, she will have no choice but to leave the sorority for not being able to cut it. Girls that complained were called a bitch and had their rooms ransacked. (Robbins 359) The new girls are told that the sorority is tearing them down in order to build them back up. It destroys their trust in other girls and in a system they thought was going to protect and nurture them. In Born Round, Frank Bruni always had a little trouble with his weight. He came from a big Italian family, where big family dinners and having a lot of food in the house was normal.

He had a personal struggle with food. He knew he should not eat so much and dieted frequently because he was embarrassed of his weight. When he got into adulthood, he gained quite a bit of weight at one point. He realized that he was judged, sometimes just by his weight alone. He liked to eat however, and got a job as a food critic. Starting out as a food writer, he managed to keep his weight down to a manageable level. As time went on, however, his weight started to creep back up. When he saw an old family friend while he was heavier, she judged him and told him he was so fat. (Bruni, 35)

This word. “ fat” sent him into a slight depression, where he put on even more weight. He dieted again, continuing in his circle of up and down weight. It took him a long time to accept who he was and find his healthy weight, and most of his psychological problems with his weight came from the word fat. A single word can be used to belittle, hurt, and humiliate. One word can cause so much hurt that it makes a person doubt who they are and their self worth. It can, however, make a person stronger. It can put events into motion that change a community. One word can change people forever.