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Learning Activity 1: Word Play in a Plural Society Stem Cells & Policy: Values & Religion Module

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Language is considered to be the primary medium of communication, an activity central to human culture and policy-making. Nevertheless, while we may speak the same language, the same words may hold different meanings, shaped by the various cultural and life experiences of individuals. This learning activity aims to reveal the ways that assumptions about shared language, or meaning, can complicate communication and, ultimately, decision-making regarding stem cell research policy. We will respond viscerally to the following words and analyze the ways that even in a single classroom a diverse set of views, emotions, and responses can emerge from a single word and its assumed shared meaning. The activity can be conducted individually or with pairs or small groups and the results reported out to the larger class.

By the completion of this activity, we will recognize that words do not necessarily have the same meaning and emotional valence for others that they do for us. As a result, when trying to explain ourselves or to persuade others, we must consider that our choice of words may confuse or offend those who are listening. By building awareness around word choice we will better support open dialogue and tolerance of different points of view.

Visceral Reactions: Please note whether your immediate response to each of these words is positive (+), neutral (N), or negative (-). Focus on your emotional reactions rather than providing a reasoned response.			
	(+)	(N)	(-)
Belief			
Chimera			
Civics			
Commodity			
Consensus			
Civics			
Ethics			
Faith			
Individual			
Dignity			
Inviolable			
Inalienable			
Pluralism			
Potential			
Private			
Public			
Reason			
Religion			
Sacred			
Science			
Secular			
Spiritual			
Values			
Vulnerable			
Waste			

For further learning, see these calls for action to define “commodification” and “human dignity.” Caulfield, T. & Ogbogu, U. 2012. Stem cell research, scientific freedom and the commodification concern. *EMBO Reports*. 13(1):12-16. [Link](#) and address conflicting value systems, Benjamin, R. 2014. Race for cures: Rethinking the racial logics of ‘trust’ in biomedicine. *Sociology Compass*. 8(6):755-769. [Link](#).