



Am I Cool?

A ready-to-use assembly
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▶ In a Nutshell

Run a 'Top Gear' Cool Wall for teacher's cars from the school you are taking the assembly in. The aim is to help students explore the ups and downs of 'coolness'. Suitable for Year 9 and above.

▶ Set Up

In a shameless rip-off / tribute to the legendary BBC programme, 'Top Gear', this assembly uses the idea of the Cool Wall. ***If you have no idea what the Cool Wall is, please see note below.

The amount of effort you go to in building a Cool Wall is up to you. Go ahead and use paper blue-tacked to a handy wall if you must, but if you can, go the whole hog and design something a little more adventurous. Whatever you choose, you'll need four clearly titled zones: 'Seriously Un Cool', 'Un Cool', 'Cool' and 'Sub-zero'.

Next you'll need to get the agreement of school staff to include them in the Cool Wall. Around ten is plenty. You'll need an A4 card with their car either written or a printed on top (not the teacher's name, just the car). If you have time, add a picture of the model too. You'll need as wide a range of cars as possible.

▶ Delivery

You can run the Cool Wall at the beginning of the assembly and then finish by talking, or divide your talk into sections as you go along.

Outline

Have the 'Top Gear' theme music playing as students come into the assembly.

What makes someone cool? Are you cool? Am I cool? Can you buy coolness, or win it, or earn it? Does the car you drive make you cool? Or is it something that just 'is'? Are some people cool and others not?

Cool hasn't always been cool, by the way. Around a hundred years ago, the word 'cool' meant 'cautious' or 'reserved'. In other words, if you were the person who always wanted to play safe, if you were quiet or even shy, if you were nervous about doing anything daring, you were cool. In 1924 Calvin Coolidge, famous for hardly ever talking, became the 30th President of the United States with the slogan 'Keep Cool with Coolidge'.

So, to put it another way, cool wasn't always cool. Back then, it was uncool.

Then, about 50 years ago, the word 'cool' changed. It was partly because of a famous jazz musician Charlie Parker, who called his music 'Cool Blues'. The music became so popular that people started using the word cool to mean stylish, fashionable or generally something pretty good. If you wore the right clothes or maybe just some very stylish sunglasses, you were cool.

So the word cool changed its meaning completely, but something else changed too. Can you work out what? Being cool changed from something you could decide - like how talkative you were - to something other people decided - like what sunglasses are in fashion.

These days, you don't get to decide if you're cool, everyone else does instead.

What would happen if everyone in this school had to be voted into one of the Cool Wall categories: Seriously Un Cool, Un Cool, Cool or Sub Zero? Not cars this time, but all of you as students. Which category would you get put in? How would people decide who was in each category? Would it be about what clothes you wear, or what music you listen, what people you hang out with? How would you feel about that? If you were voted 'Sub Zero', would you want to spend break hanging out with someone who'd been voted 'Seriously Un Cool'? And if you were the person who was 'Un Cool', how would that make you feel inside?

We may not use the 'Top Gear' categories, but lots of people judge others all the time, deciding if they're cool or not. A survey a few years ago for Radio 1 found that the thing we want most as teenagers is to be popular with other people. To be thought of as cool. And the reason most teenagers give for being depressed is that they're not popular. Being cool matters to a lot of us.

But imagine what it would be like if you met a person who really didn't care about being cool? In fact, they made a point of hanging out with the uncoolest people in the school, the ones everyone else thought were 'Seriously Un Cool'. Imagine this person didn't care if you were cool or not, they treated everyone the same way. Imagine they thought more about you because of who you are on the inside, not how stylish you are on the outside? Imagine they tore down the 'Top Gear' Cool Wall and treated everyone exactly the same. Can you think of people you know, or anyone else who's really lived like that?

So here's my final question, if you had a choice, which would you rather be? Someone seen as cool because they're stylish or popular, or someone who doesn't care about being cool at all? Which one is really cool?

If you want music playing as students leave, try 'Being Cool' by Kimya Dawson.

You have a choice here about how directly you want to talk about Jesus. You can talk a little more about how Jesus sees people, or you can leave it more mysterious and challenge students to think about who has really personified that in history? Both approaches can work.

*** Seriously? You really need to slow down your social life and watch more TV. And if you really need help/inspiration for how to present this, try looking up clips of 'Top Gear Cool Wall' on Youtube.

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