



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS

Present

The Bully Plays

Happy Birthday, Heather Higby by Stephen Gregg

What Goes Around by D.W. Gregory

A Bunch of Clowns by Sandra Fenichel Asher

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors' production of *The Bully Plays*. We are offering this study guide to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming performance at your school. Recognizing that bullying is all too pervasive in our schools, our goal is to address the topic openly, and hopefully provide our audience with an opportunity to reflect, ask questions, and brainstorm strategies for dealing with this problem, whether they perceive themselves to be bullied, bullies, or bystanders. Perhaps, in different contexts, any of us can play any one of those roles.

BULLYING: A DEFINITION

According to Susan Sugerman, MD, MPH (President/Co-founder of Girls to Women Health and Wellness, Dallas, Texas):

Bullying differs from friendly teasing or gentle coaxing. Bullying is aggressive behavior intended to harm or show power over another person that is repeated over time. Teasing can be fun between friends, but it becomes bullying if only one person enjoys it while the other suffers. While taunting is easy to recognize as social aggression, more subtle forms of bullying, such as excluding someone, gossiping, or spreading false rumors, can be harder to identify in real time. Bullying also happens when an aggressor tries to get others to join in "disliking" or "disrespecting" someone else, when people use friendship as a weapon for revenge, or when former "friends" withdraw attention to prove a point or display power.

PLAY SYNOPSES

Happy Birthday, Heather Higby by Stephen Gregg

As the play opens, we learn that Mercy Nightingale is planning an elaborate revenge plot for her nemesis, Heather Higby. She wants to destroy Heather's reputation by airing the worst rumors about her she can find. She employs spies whose job it is to sneak around the school finding out bad things about Heather. Then we meet Charlene, who comes on stage and disrupts Mercy's performance. Charlene is doing her own performance piece, also about rumors, she says. When Mercy's nasty rumors about Heather begin to spread, Charlene steps in and stops the rumors dead in their tracks, with a counterattack of her own: spreading good rumors. This play highlights the power of positive language.

What Comes Around by D.W. Gregory

Smedley is having a bad day. First, his boss attacks him for a drop in sales and fires him on the spot. He then goes to his son's baseball game where his son strikes out in the final inning, losing the game for his team. Smedley loses it and lashes out angrily at his two kids. The bad day spreads. The two kids and their crew of friends gang up on Marcie on the bus, refusing to let her sit down. Marcie loses it and lashes out in anger. The bad day continues to spread when the boss – who is Marcie's mom – is summoned to the principal's office and blamed for Marcie's misbehavior. In the end, the character who started her day as a bully ends her day as the victim. This play considers what happens when we don't "treat others the way we'd like to be treated."

A Bunch of Clowns by Sandra Fenichel Asher

The New Kid at school is invited by the Ringmaster to join her bunch of clowns. The New Kid has three choices, the Ringmaster says. You can be a Bully, the Bullied, or a Bystander. The clowns attempt to draw the New Kid into their increasingly cruel games, and soon the line between teasing and bullying is blurred. Soon, the clowns who thought they could choose to remain bystanders find out that's impossible. Somehow, the New Kid resists the Ringmaster's categories and finds a fourth option: she introduces herself by name. She attempts to begin a friendship, based on knowing who she really is.

LESSON IDEAS

Before the performance, give your students time to think about, write about, and/or discuss the following topics and questions. Consider devoting a few minutes of class time daily in the week or two weeks leading up to the performance.

1. What does bullying look like?
2. Tell me about a time you witnessed bullying.
3. Tell me about a time you experienced bullying.
4. Tell me about a time you bullied someone.
5. How do you care for yourself in times when the people around you aren't showing you care?
6. What are some ways you can support someone when they are the victim of bullying?
7. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew both "the bully" and "the bullied"? How did you handle it? How would you handle it differently next time?
8. Have you witnessed or personally experienced bullying online? How is it different from or similar to bullying that happens in "real life"?

OTHER RESOURCES

Videos

Student-generated short video defining bullying and talking about what students can do in response:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/video/player.asp?video=216>

Music video about cyberbullying (Trigger warning: mention of suicide):

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/stories/mystory.asp?id=2272>

Music video about bullying and how people can respond:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/video/player.asp?video=182>

Lesson Ideas

Bullying Prevention Quick Guide:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/info/pdf/BP-101-mhschool.pdf>

Cyberbullying Prevention Quick Guide:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/info/pdf/BP-101-mhschool-cyberbullying.pdf>

Above the Line/Below the Line activity:

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/classroom/elementary/activities/pdf/above-below-the-line.pdf>

Websites for Students

<https://www.stompoutbullying.org/>

<https://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org/>