

CCS /ELA /SS Alignment for *Confessions of a Former Bully*

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Life Lessons- Leaning out of Being Bullied and Leaning into Real Life Resiliency

In what ways do young adult works go above and beyond being just texts of information or narratives to supporting their audience in recognizing bullying as it manifests itself in their lives and responding to it as victims or as bystanders? A close examination of a single YA work can serve as a core curriculum to help readers who find themselves being subtly or overtly physically and verbally bullied. Beyond detailing and defining the broad spectrum of “bully words” and “actions” how do this text model for young readers ways to deal with bullying as it manifests itself in their lives?

YA “BULLY” TOPIC TEXT 1 –CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER BULLY –New York: Dragonfly Books, 2010

Trudy Ludwig’s *Confessions of a Former Bully* (2010) is a fictional artfully laid and accessible “journal” of a ten year old girl paying the “consequences “of bullying a peer by keeping a reflective journal for her guidance counselor. Although Katie the girl is a fictive character and so is Miss Petro ski her guidance counselor, the knowledge base derived from 11 scholarly studies on bullying, books for adults and cited organizations (all cited at the back of the book) is all too real.

Through the first person journal of 10 year old Katie who initially didn’t think she had bullied Monica because she had not physically her, readers learn the actual criteria for “bullying” words and actions.

POTENTIAL TEACHABLE MOMENT 1: Before the students actually examine the text or start any youth court or bullying unit activities- have them define in as detailed a fashion as they can what constitutes bullying behaviors. Allow them in a group to make a list of them and then have them compare and contrast those with Katie’s plus consult the web list of other websites at the back of her book. Of course, the student developed lists can be compared and contrasted with Katie’s. (CCSS ELA Writing Explanatory pieces, Special Domain Vocabulary, and Short Research Papers)

Among these actions according to Katie’s research are:

1. Physical Bullying
2. Use of words and the tone in which the words are uttered about, to, or with others.
3. Other actions such as laughing at someone’s mistakes, ignoring that person on purpose, and making faces.
4. Setting up boundaries with so-called friends by telling them what they could or could not do if they wanted to remain friends with you.
5. Cyber Bullying by using Internet, cell phones, cameras, text messaging or posting embarrassing pictures/staring an I hate club on line.

POTENTIAL TEACHABLE MOMENT 2: (CCSS ELA Narrative- Memoir Writing- Explanatory Writing- Reflective Literary Response Writing)

Teachers can start an introductory “the bully in all of us and/or the “bullied” moment in all of our lives memoir piece by asking students to draw, write or share aloud a moment in time when they were the victim of bullies or were bullied or were silent bystanders to bullying or actively protested or reported bullying. Encourage them to admit that even within their lives thus far in grade, middle or high school, it is extremely possible and even to be expected that they may have been victims of bullies, bystanders or even bullies themselves. The key item is to reflect on all of these at times contradictory roles – many who are bullied act like bullies in other situations or stand by silently as they witness others being bullied- and to “choose” as Mrs. Petrowski says the role a student plays.

TEACHABLE MOMENT/RESOURCE SHEET 3: Quotes that can serve as a platform for Life Lessons on Bullying and Leaning In to help others – Come Backs to and from being Bullied- Trudy Ludwig’s “Think About It”

Collected quotes- Before or during any discussion or youth court or mediation or literature/news role play students can focus on one or more of these quotes. They can react to it , summarize it, agree with it or disagree and then finally use it in the youth court, conflict resolution or mediation activity.- CCSS ELA summarizing, argument, and reflection writing skills- Speaking and Listening the full range of skills, reading for details, craft and structure and knowledge. These quotes can also be comparative texts for any novels, online news, informational texts or transcripts the students are studying.

Beyond her references to the guidance wisdom of Mrs. Petrowski, Katie’s fictional journal includes as sidebars under the heading “Think about it” a collection of quotes. These include:

1. As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.
Sam Levenson
2. My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me.
Henry Ford
3. One of the greatest diseases is to be a nobody to somebody.
Mother Teresa
4. You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.
5. Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no man’s definition of your life; define yourself.
Harvey Fierstein
6. You must be the change you wish to see in the world.
Mahatma Gandhi

7. In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In addition to the quotes which make a nice readable –short research informational bridge to facts about bullying, Ludwig deliberately inserts QUICK FACTS as orange sidebars which are referenced by footnotes to research studies cited in the back of the book.

Among these facts easily accessible to readers of this seemingly “student friendly” illustrated journal are:

QUICK FACTS

1. Nine out of ten elementary students have been bullied by their peers.
2. As of 2009, 160, 000 students miss school because of bullying.
3. Eight year olds who bully are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age twenty four.
4. Most cyber-bullying occurs between nine and fourteen years of age.
5. Bullying is a learned behavior.
6. Emotional bullying – spreading rumors, gossiping, giving the silent treatment or excluding others) – can be more harmful than physical bullying.
7. It’s harder to have kids bully you when you have supportive classmates by your side.
8. Kids who are targeted by bullies get headaches or stomachaches.
9. Bystanders to bullying also get headaches and stomachaches.
10. Bullies are more likely to go to jail, use alcohol or drop out of school. They are often the same individuals who feel lonely or sad and have few close friends.
11. TATTILING is when you try to get kids in trouble when they are not trying to get kids IN trouble when they aren’t hurting themselves or others.
12. REPORTING is when you’re trying to help kids OUT of trouble because these kids are getting hurt. Report to someone who is a grownup who cares and who can help.

TEACHABLE MOMENT 4: To use these facts for CCSS ELA Reading for facts and details, short research, special domain /nuanced vocabulary, and speaking and listening- develop a short true or false and why in your opinion- pre quiz so students have a pre-bully unit information knowledge base BEFORE they do research or read any of the texts on this topic. This quiz might look like this:

1. Should you always tattle on bullies or only report under certain conditions? If you feel you should always tattle, explain why or why not. If you think you should only report under certain conditions, explain what they are or what they are not.
2. What is the difference between “tattling” and “reporting”? Explain in your own words.
3. Bullies are born that way. True or false.
4. Emotional bullying is much less harmful than physical bullying. Explain why or why not.
5. Being a bully as a grade school student does not affect what type of adult citizen you will become.

6. Bullying does not have any physical consequences for those who bully as far as their own health or for those who are bystanders and do nothing when bullying is happening to others.)

Beyond quotes from actual personalities and facts from web resources, Katie's fictional journal offers a real life set of tools and strategies that students being bullied can use to reach out and give back, to bounce back resiliently. These tools and strategies include:

1. Respond to a mean or negative comment with: a) Look speaker in eye and say "Stop it."
2. Ask "why" and repeat what was said- that pauses the bully.
3. Walk away from the comment to a safe place or the company of friends.
4. Respond with neutral, calm tones- "So," "Whatever," "Huh." "Who cares?"
5. Change the subject to something else.
6. Act silly or goofy.
7. Turn a negative into something positive –so if you are told your face is pimply mention that Cameron Diaz had pimples as teen and look at her now or if you are now a bean poll- say that in a few years you'll be a super model walking the runway and thanks for noticing.
8. If you get a cyber bully negative message print out , do not RESPOND online and show it to an adult in charge.

TEACHABLE MOMENT 5: Although these tools are based on web resources and studies, they are not universally applicable or workable for everyone. Challenge students to go through the list and to make a CCSS ELA/SS connection by developing arguments for and against the relevance of applicability of these "Tools" to personal, youth court, literature , school, district, and news stories of bullying. Have them detail and argue for one or more of these as viable useful strategies in the context of various actual or narrated cases of bullying or argue powerfully against one or more of these strategies being effective. This makes argument formation authentic and meaningful plus immediately connects it with citizen now-whether elementary, middle or high student rights and responsibilities.

But sometimes, students are not the targets of bullies and don't need to literally or metaphorically have their toolkit of responses to hand or "mouth." One of the most valuable aspects of Ludwig's accessible "fictional work" is that Katie discusses in her journal what students can "do" whatever their grade when they witness bullying.

TEACHABLE MOMENT 6: Ask students to share an experience where they have been "safe on the sidelines of "bullying." They have just been "bystanders." Ask them if they feel that as bystanders they have been responsible for doing anything at all, since they are not adults and have no legal or physical power to stop the actions. Allow them to run a conversation about what they would or would not have done and whether they should DO anything as underage student bystanders to bullying. This allows educators to fulfill all the Speaking and listening standards of CCSS ELA and SS plus to train and to alert students to opportunities for them as students to display leadership and proactive citizenship qualities.

Ludwig's work suggests that bystanders can be heroes by: noticing, caring, and reaching out to students being bullied, not hooking up with the bullies and reporting what they saw to an adult with power.

What is most positive and helpful about the Ludwig work is that although it is framed as the journal of a student reflecting on being a bully, it ends with Katie making a chart of the qualities of being a "good friend" to others versus being a "bad friend." This is a nice transition and transformation from bully to being a friend.

TEACHABLE MOMENT 7: Have students create a T chart of the qualities that they view in their "good friends" versus the qualities of "bad friends." This can be a planning period for an argument or persuasive CCSS ELA/SS essay or can be referenced to American History political allies and wars as well. It can be a personal reflection or a short research paper, but most importantly it can be a reflecting platform for a student life lesson about being a real friend or partner versus being a manipulator of other students. Many friendships of students are based on one "manipulating" or "controlling" another even if they are not actually "bullying" the other students.

Students can review the T chart of "good friends" including qualities such as : likes you for who you are, allows you to choose your own friends, says good things about you, makes you feel accepted, helps you with problems, can be counted on , and want to be with you. They can compare , contrast and debate the qualities of bad "friends " on the T chart which include: put you down, dictate to you who your friends should be, gossip about you, sometimes say hurtful things about you, make you feel unsafe, refuse to admit they have made a mistake, are nice one day and nasty the next, and drop you for "someone better." Whether students are in agreement or not with this T chart, it will get them engaged in a student/citizen conversation which can hopefully shape their actions outside of school as they choose their friends and decide how to treat others.