



THE BULLY PLAYS

DEC 12-14 | MAY 1-3

NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS

Present

The Bully Plays

Bystander Blues by Trish Lindberg

Passing Period Purgatory by Christian Kiley

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.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PERFORMANCE

As each class enters the performance space, our volunteers will greet you with a set of blank index cards and golf pencils. Please make sure that each student receives one card and one pencil.

Before the play begins, we'll explain that we are looking for student involvement in the performance today. We will invite students to write down a question or a comment while watching the play. The question could be connected to the theme of the play (example: Why do bullies bully?) or a question of curiosity for one of the actors. The comment could be a connection they make with the material. After the play ends, our volunteers will collect any cards students have written on. The performance is two short plays, and we will give students time after each play to write and submit a card.

After both plays are done, a team of student actors will come out and address the audience. They will read aloud some of the cards submitted by the audience. If it's a question about bullying, they'll do their best to answer, using their own experiences as a guide. They will also read aloud from audience comment cards. Keep in mind that anything they read aloud will be kept anonymous.

Our student actors are not experts in bullying, and they are not trained counselors. They are regular kids, just like your students, and their answers to audience questions will reflect their age and experiences. We invite you to use this performance to open dialogue with your students about how bullying affects their lives or your school community. We invite you to build off the conversation started at the performance by continuing to talk, listen, and exchange ideas. A common refrain we hear from young people is that teachers or other adults "don't do anything" about bullying. Making space and time for these important conversations in *your* classroom is one way to demonstrate to students that adults do care about bullying.

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

Bystander Blues by Trish Lindberg

In *Bystander Blues* we see and hear a Greek chorus of bystanders witnessing and reacting to a character named Katie getting bullied by two popular kids, Johnnie and Samantha. The chorus gives us details around a handful of days in which Katie is treated poorly and made the punching bag of tasteless jokes. The bystanders lament their lack of involvement. They say how they could’ve helped in the situation and stood up for Katie. But they don’t. They simply observe and stay out of the way of the two bullies. Even when directly posed with an opportunity to step in, Katie’s friends are avoidant of confrontation. Katie is left alone and helpless.

Bystander Blues shows us how damaging the ramifications of inaction can be. The audience is left to wonder how much of a difference could’ve been made had Katie’s friends spoken out against Johnnie’s and Samantha’s unkind treatment of her. It is easier and safer to stay out of the way of bullies, but a simple word or a simple act could change so much for the better.

Passing Period Purgatory by Christian Kiley

In this play, a repetition is established from a few perspectives where conventional outcasts are bullied by a hive of popular kids. In each scene, the rhythm of “normal” is presented by the Toxic crowd and then disturbed by the socially awkward and those unbound by fear of deviation. We get the point of view from a diverse cast of non-Toxic characters, and we see how they react differently. From Newel who is confused and disturbed, to Uniform who tries to blend in; from Invisible who wishes to be seen but is accepting of their ostracized fate, to Hero who wishes to defend the bullied but is in turn bullied themselves.

In *Passing Period Purgatory*, there is at first inaction from the bystanders in instances of bullying. But as the play progresses, we see them start to step in and make differences. At first by offering encouraging words to the bullied and then by actually speaking up and stopping the bullies. We see the positive impact of small acts of kindness, and we get to see the larger change made by fighting against bullying.

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.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org/>

This study guide was compiled by Marisa Rothrock, a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, and Rachel Ribeiro, Executive Director of NMYA. Copyright 2024. All Rights Reserved.