



## GAY STRAIGHT ADVOCATES FOR EDUCATION

Working to Make Every Student and Every Educator SAFE at School  
Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression

Taken from the website of The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities  
<http://www.sacsc.ca/upload/pdf/Stein%20English%20chocolate%20wars.pdf>

### English - Grade 11

#### A Novel Study: *The Chocolate War*

#### **Bullying: The Role and Responsibilities of Bystanders**

##### **Objective**

This lesson is based on Robert Cormier's novel *The Chocolate War*. The novel comments on peer pressure, nonconformity, bullying and harassment. It provides an opportunity to explore issues related to bullying and harassment that focus on the role of the bystander. Students come to understand the powerful influence bystanders have on decreasing bullying and harassment. They are encouraged to think about and take action to intervene when they witness abuse of this nature. The story takes place in a New England Catholic boys' school in the 1970s. The protagonist is Jerry Renault, the quarterback for the Trinity High junior varsity football team. The antagonists are Archie Costello, a member of the school's exclusive but clandestine Vigils Club, and Brother Leon, the teacher who abuses his authority and condones intimidation. Conflict occurs when Archie orders Jerry to do his bidding and eventually Jerry refuses. Archie and Jerry become enemies, and the conflict between them escalates. A central question the novel asks is, Should one stand up for others or avoid being involved and suffer inevitable rejection and taunting?

**Time** 2 to 3 80-minute classes

##### **Materials**

- Overhead 1 "Violence"
- Overhead 2 "Bullying"

##### **Knowledge Now**

To focus on the topic, begin with this word-association activity. Draw three concentric rings on the board. Write the word *violence* in the centre circle and ask students to think of words or phrases that come to mind when they hear the word *violence*. Write their ideas in the middle circle as they call them out. Write the word *causes* in the next ring. Again ask students for word associations that suggest the causes of violence. Write their responses in the *causes* ring. Finally, write the word *results* in the next ring and repeat the brainstorming process. After this word-association exercise is finished, ask the students (individually or in small groups) to generate a definition of the term *violence* (write these on 11"x 17" sheets of paper in large printing). Post students' definitions on the walls. Ask them to make generalizations from the definitions that are posted.

##### **Use Overhead 1 "Violence"**

*The actual or threatened use of physical, verbal, sexual or emotional power, intimidation or harassment by an individual or group which is harmful to the physical, psychological or social well-being of an individual or group.*

##### **Show Overhead 2 "Bullying"**

To clarify the meaning of the term *bullying*. Ask students whether or not they consider bullying to be a form of violence. If students do not see bullying as violence, explore their reasons. Typically, students will say that victims are kids who don't fit in. They will suggest ways they are taunted.

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### **Lead a discussion that asks “What are the consequences of bullying on . . .”**

- the victim?
- the bully?
- those who witness the scene?
- When bullying takes place in a school situation, who is most likely to be involved (do not name names)?
- Have you or anyone you know been bullied? Ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class.

### **Engaging Interest**

Students will write a paragraph about a bullying situation they either witnessed or experienced personally. Consider using visualization (guided imagery) to stimulate thinking prior to writing. Use the five Ws (who, what, when, where and why) to guide the visualization process. Who was involved? What were the circumstances? What led up to the incident? What were the behaviors of the person who bullied the victim and the people who watched? Did anyone help the victim? Why or why not? After students have written their stories and experiences, ask them to share them if they feel comfortable doing so. Caution them not to use people's names in telling their stories.

### **Learning Activities**

- **Ask students to read Robert Cormier's novel *The Chocolate War* prior to beginning this lesson. Base the following discussion on the novel *The Chocolate War*. Keep a record of student responses by noting their responses on the board or on chart paper. Ask:**
  1. What actions were taken against Jerry that were examples of bullying or harassment?
  2. What were Goober's personal reactions to what happened to Jerry?
  3. What did Goober do to protest the treatment Jerry received? (For example, Jerry felt sick, he stayed away from school, quit the football team and so on.)
  4. When the Vigils and Brother Leon were taunting and bullying Jerry, what strategy did Goober use to try to stop it?
  5. Why were Goober's reactions ineffective? Why didn't Goober do more?
  6. Should Jerry have had to give up what he believed was right for the sake of maintaining peace?
  7. What other strategies could Goober have tried to stop the increasing intimidation and harassment? How could this have happened without Goober putting himself in danger?
- **Continue to explore the role of the bystander by giving students opportunities to brainstorm ideas in groups of four or five. Ask them to think about the following ideas:**
  1. Was there a point when other students, the bystanders, could have prevented the abuse from escalating?
  2. In what ways did the bystanders bear responsibility for the bullying that occurred at Trinity?
  3. Why are bystanders responsible in situations like this?
  4. List some strategies that you feel bystanders might have used to safely stop the increasing intensity of emotions and bullying (leading to violence) at the school.
  5. Invite the school counselor to be present when students share their ideas. Ask the counselor to discuss strategies for dealing with bullying. Focus especially on those strategies that maintain the safety of the bystander while dealing with the person who is bullying.
  6. Create a master chart of strategies suggested by students that would be most effective and safe for bystanders in stopping bullying behavior. Stress that most bullies get peer approval (or silence) and this approval actually encourages.
  7. Ask students to suggest several conditions that might result in students being bullied (for example, clothes, hair, height, color of skin, weight, glasses and so on).
  8. In groups of three or four, have students role play a bullying incident with bystanders and ask the bystanders to demonstrate the use of one of the safe strategies for intervention.

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### **Alternative writing activity**

To help students think about peer pressure, ask them to think about a time when they (or someone they know) made the choice to wear, buy, eat or behave according to what they thought was acceptable even though they didn't agree or like doing it. Ask why they made the choice to do what others expected or approved instead of what they wanted to do. Describe the thoughts and feelings one has when choices are made based on other's rather than one's own expectations and beliefs.

### **Assessment/Analysis**

Following the role-playing experience, assign students singly or with a partner to create an antibullying poster that includes suggestions for how bystanders can take safe action to prevent bullying behavior.

### **Application**

Challenge students to take action to make a difference at school, at home and in the community. Refer to posters and charts that were created during the course of the lesson. Stress that unless actions are taken to do follow through, bullying and harassment will continue. Refer students to the websites provided in this lesson to find out more. Urge the school's student council to organize activities that foster a safe and more caring school culture.

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## **Overhead 1 - Violence**

**The actual or threatened use of physical, verbal, sexual or emotional power, intimidation or harassment by an individual or group which is harmful to the physical, psychological or social well-being of an individual or group.**

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## **Overhead 2 – Bullying**

**Bullying is a repeated pattern of unprovoked, aggressive behaviors (physical, behavioral, or psychological) carried out by an individual or group that results in harm or hurt. It is always unwelcome, unwanted and uncomfortable to the person(s) against whom it is directed. *Bullying is everybody's problem. Do you have the courage to stop it?***

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