

BULLYING: REPRESENTATIVE NOVELS, CHARACTERS, AND RESOLUTIONS

Because bullying is a topic so many schools are addressing directly through character education curriculum, the researchers of this study selected specific books that would contribute to a lesson on bullying. Each book explores the topic differently. The following books are some resources that teachers seeking award-winning chapter books for a context to explore and discuss bullying might find particularly helpful.

DOG SENSE BY SNEED B. COLLARD III

When confronted repeatedly by bully Brad, Guy decides not to report him to authorities. Instead, he risks losing his prized possession, his dog Streak, by challenging Brad and his dog to a winner-take-all Frisbee catching contest. Brad's fierce determination, coupled with his fear that he has foolishly risked losing his beloved dog on a bet to a bully, adds depth and complexity to the characterization and the conflict. Further, honor comes into play when Guy must decide if he wants to duplicate Brad's unscrupulous tactics to win the competition or to use his ingenuity to win fairly. With this novel, teachers clearly have multiple vantage points from which to help students explore layered issues related to strong character.

DRAGONBREATH BY URSULA VERNON

Big Eddy, an intimidating Komodo dragon, and his sidekicks, Jason the salamander and Harry the chameleon, do not model S.U.C.C.E.S.S. traits, and so are not listed among the characters in the research data about this novel. They do however appear briefly in a memorable confrontation when they bully protagonist Danny Dragonbreath and his iguana friend Wendell in the school cafeteria. Danny and Wendell's ingenious retaliation of Big Eddy's harassment (using some lively potato salad, no less) introduces young readers to the concept that wit and intelligence can sometimes trump brute force. Also helpful for lessons is the fact that the bullying scenario is encapsulated in two brief chapters ("Food Fight," pp. 26-38 and "Bully Up," pp. 141-146), lending itself to be succinctly read, discussed, and reinforced in a single lesson.

ESCAPING THE GIANT WAVE BY PEG KEHRET

Daren Hazelton has been bullying protagonist Kyle for so long at school that what Kyle looks forward to most about his family's trip to the Oregon coast is his chance

to be away from Daren. The Hazeltons ends up at the same lodge as Kyle's family, and among many heroic actions that Kyle models is his decision to save an unconscious Daren from the burning, smoke-permeated lodge. Although Kyle does not stand up for himself when bullied, he musters the courage once he learns that Daren has been bullying Kyle's little sister, too.

The scenes when Kyle rescues Daren and then Daren shows no gratitude, and when Kyle finally finds the strength to confront Daren for his sister's sake illustrate the power of altruism, and the importance of doing the right thing simply because it's the right thing to do. It's a lesson that more mature elementary school students may be able to process and appreciate.

THE LEMONADE WAR BY JACQUELINE DAVIES

The central plot of this novel has nothing to do with bullying, but concerns a competition between 10-year-old Evan and his 8-year old sister, Jessie. As a result, the scene in *The Lemonade War* where a small band of cruel girls reveal to Jessie what the abbreviation of their WHJ Club really means is encapsulated into a single sequence (foreshadowed p. 17, 47; revealed pp. 71-74). Even more uniquely, it is relayed as a flashback that occurred more than a year ago.

Although the pain of the incident still stings, Jessie has had time to process details from the revelation, rebound from some of the pain, and gain a few insights from her experience. This perspective provides much for students to absorb and explore further. In discussing the incident in small groups or as a class, students may discover, through one character's experience, at least, some lingering effects of such harassment and some coping mechanisms for moving past the emotional and psychological damage incurred from being bullied.

PERCY JACKSON & THE LAST OLYMPIANS, BOOK 2:

THE SEA OF MONSTERS BY RICK RIORDAN

On the last day of school Percy Jackson sees his only friend, Tyson, being bullied by more roughians that he'd ever seen at school before. Ultimately, the bullies reveal themselves to be cannibal giants, paving the way for Percy's next adventure in the world of fantasy in which he is destined to be a lord. The transformation of the bullies into something otherworldly might prompt a lesson about looking more deeply at bullies to understand that there is more motivation to their destructive behavior than mere cruelty. Finding a motive could potentially help some victims, as well as bullies find a root to the problem that might lead to solutions.

SCHOOLED BY GORDON KORMAN

Gordon Korman addresses the topic of bullying head-on through protagonist Capricorn Anderson, who faces many obstacles when he begins middle school after living a sheltered life with his grandmother. One strength of this work is the variety of personalities and relationships that abound at Cap's new school. Rather than portraying stereotypic, one-dimensional bullies and victims, Korman introduces readers to some nuanced characters, among them some of the bullies. This multi-faceted characterization might help students see that even bullies have many qualities, some of them worthy of attention and, occasionally, even respect. Written for a slightly older readership than *Trading Places with Tank Talbot*, *Schooled* might provide an engaging lesson on bullying for older elementary or middle school students.

TRADING PLACE WITH TANK TALBOT BY DORI HILLESTAD BUTLER

Dori Hillestad Butler's novel is another of the few books in the study where bullying serves the central theme of the story. Protagonist Jason Pfeiffer lives with the fear of being bullied by Tank Talbot. When both boys end up enrolled in community classes that they dread, but that the other can do, their mutual goal of trading places to help each other puts the boys on a more level playing field, giving Jason a little more confidence and softening Tank just a tad.

Having to become Tank gives Jason several opportunities to understand and even develop compassion for Tank once he experiences how reviled bullies are and how they are sometimes blamed for mishaps just because of their past reputations. Jason also imagines how difficult it would be for bullies to change because their past behavior leads others to judge, fear, despise, and avoid them.

What's most unique, and useful for a character education lesson, is that Jason has the opportunity to observe why Tank became a bully, as he sees Tank being bullied by his older brother. That brief, revealing scene (pp. 86-89) could spark an enlightening discussion about why bullies develop their destructive behaviors and how compassion from walking in another person's shoes could be a tool to help some victims and bullies resolve conflicts.