



Letter to Teachers

Lesson 4, Counselor Resource

Dear Colleague:

If your experience is similar to mine you may notice some resistance from your students as you keep bringing out these lessons. I've found that kids are a bit defensive about the "B" word (bullying). Think about it though; if one's behavior is suddenly coming under class scrutiny it is probably normal to want to dismiss it. This lesson comes at an opportune time then. It is all inclusive in its view. By that I mean that it is looking at every member of the student population- the bully – the target and the bystander. It is also opening the door to our eventual hero – the **defender**.

Who is this defender? The defender is the student who has the courage, the esteem and the power to stand up to bullies and supports those of lesser power. There are countless defenders in your classroom today. Some are already walking that walk and talking the talk. Some are looking on trying to decide if they dare take on that role; they may want to but they aren't confident enough yet. How do we help them to step forward and embrace their role as hero? Most educators in this area believe that the key is through teaching **empathy**. How does one do that?

- **Identify all the emotional consequences of bullying.** Truly highlight that *every student* is hurt by bullying; the learning climate of the classroom is impaired; the culture of the institution is diminished. There are some wonderful pieces that are included in this lesson that give you lots of rich opportunities to let the kids process that.
- **Affirm the fact that most of the students you address are in the role of bystander.** They are indeed your silent majority. Challenge them to stand up to the bullies (lesser in number) who impact their world. You're looking for ways to shift their roles from apathetic or fearful onlookers to positive supporters of targets. The last journal activity offers an excellent opportunity to do just that. In this case it is "friend to friend" so it gives the bystander a safer place to start practicing that skill.
- **Help them to literally "step into the skin" of another student.** Human beings tend to distance themselves from pain in order to protect their own fragile egos. Sometimes it is simply too painful to imagine another's difficulties and simpler to just ignore them. Perhaps you could encourage them to brainstorm all the times in history where people turned their backs on another's pain. (Holocaust, Civil Rights Movement, etc). What are the consequences of ignoring human injustice, harassment and cruelty? You could have a great discussion on how history might have been changed if onlookers had dared more to support.
- **What about our world today?** So many of our kids are political today. Our country is struggling right now and kids can't help but be feeling it as it impacts their families. I suspect that they've heard more political, societal and philosophical conversation

from their homes lately due to the economic state of the world. Highlighting that worldview can be an excellent way to help them to start thinking globally. While they can't control the economy or the world they can indeed make an impact on their day to day world. You might start by asking them to reflect on prominent people and groups that are confronting bullies and injustice today. (i.e. Bono, Bill Gates, Oprah) Are they making a difference? Is it worth it? What does it take to do that? Can teens make a difference today? Are there students that they see in their school who are already doing that on a school wide basis? What makes them different?

The last few lessons in this series work more specifically about strategies for our heroes – the defenders. I think you'll find some exciting conversations to come. I hope that you continue to have fun with these lessons. It's exciting to open the door to positive change.

Cheers!

Chris