

DO THE RIGHT THING

Allison L. Baer and Jacqueline N. Glasgow

Take the Bullies to Task: Using Process Drama to Make a Stand

To “empower students to think and act more effectively” concerning violence and bullying within schools, Allison L. Baer and Jacqueline N. Glasgow suggest close examination and discussion of literature that foregrounds violence and bystander participation. Baer and Glasgow recommend several useful novels for addressing the various roles of bystanders. Additionally, they use process drama as a safe activity to help students creatively and realistically explore problems and solutions when confronted by violence.

Let us remember: what hurts the victim the most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander.

—Elie Wiesel, quoted in Nicholas D. Kristof, “The Silence of Bystanders”

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he world was shocked when Robert Cormier introduced us to Jerry Renault and Archie Costello in his 1974 book, *The Chocolate War*.

How could he extol the strength of a bully, allowing him to prevail while some school administrators and peers stood silent? Surely these kinds of things didn't really happen and were simply the imaginings of an author bent on selling books.

Unfortunately, school violence is not imaginary. There is no official way to know the extent of school violence in the 1970s as the earliest reporting was done much later. Record-keeping changed dramatically when the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required that all states receiving federal funds “shall have in effect a State law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a weapon to a school under the jurisdiction of local educational agencies in that State” (Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, Sec. 8921 (b) (1)) and to report all incidents of school violence. Interestingly, *weapon* is defined solely as a firearm.

Since reporting began in 1994 the statistics have been unsettling, making Cormier's early description seem mild. In one year—July 1, 1999,

through June 30, 2000—there were thirty-two reported school-associated deaths (DeVoe et al. v). Not included in this report is the tragic April 20, 1999, shooting at Columbine High School where two armed boys left fifteen dead and twenty-three wounded in what still stands as the worst school massacre in United States history (WhyFiles.org). For the 2003–04 school year, 96 percent of high schools and 94 percent of middle schools reported violent criminal acts (Guerino et al. 2).

Could it be that Cormier saw something that many educators did not want to admit was happening? Now, when violence in school has escalated beyond fisticuffs and swirlies, what is our response? While educators and school boards are trying various measures to improve school safety, English teachers have a powerful tool—literature. By bringing violence in literature to the foreground, we can enrich the lessons and perspectives these stories offer readers. Furthermore, by using process drama, in which students take on roles to solve problems, we can empower students to think and act more effectively.

School violence is a life-and-death issue. Thousands of children go to school every day filled with fear and trepidation; others feign illness to avoid being taunted or attacked on the way to

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school, in the schoolyard, in hallways, and in bathrooms. Breaking the cycle of violence involves more than stopping the bully. It requires us to examine everyone involved. Bullying is a group phenomenon in which a variety of players contribute a number of roles, pressures, and influences, either intentionally or unintentionally, and are substantially involved in the bullying episode either as active participants or as bystanders who are unable or unwilling to take an activist role (O'Connell, Pepler, and

Craig). Bystanders, rarely seen as participating and frequently referred to as merely "innocent," are more than just witnesses to the violent acts. Whether as assistants, reinforcers, outsiders, or defenders, bystanders have a definite place in school violence. We propose that students be involved in a close examination of the bystanders in young adult literature to help them understand that they are in the best position to stop bullying and violence. We begin with an overview of young adult literature that portrays various types of bystanders and end with a classroom activity that uses process drama to help students see the multiple perspectives involved in acts of school violence.

Roles Bystanders Play

A bystander is "a person who does not become actively involved in a situation where someone else requires help" (Clarkson 6). Bystanders stay on the sidelines, don't intervene, and don't get help no matter how badly someone needs it. Bystanders are not passive; witnesses to bullying and school violence play various roles, some more active than others. The following participant roles were identified in a study by Christina Salmivalli:

- > Assistants who join in and assist the bully
- > Reinforcers who do not actively attack the victim but give positive feedback to the bully, providing an audience by laughing and making other encouraging gestures
- > Outsiders who stay away, not taking sides with anyone or becoming involved, but allow

the bullying to continue by their silent approval

- > Defenders who show anti-bullying behavior, comforting the victim, taking sides with him or her, and trying to stop the bullying

Salmivalli asserts that peer bystanders are powerful moderators of behavior and that peer group power could be utilized positively in classrooms to end bullying and thus influence the outcomes in other school violence situations. Teachers and administrators are the most effective and proper agents of authority and should be able to intervene in these power struggles, but they don't always know they are happening, much less take appropriate action.

Many works written for young adults portray ways in which bystanders either reinforce the bully or defend the victim. Figure 1 gives an overview of eleven contemporary young adult novels with the role of the bystander(s) defined. While each book has multiple types of bystanders, we chose to analyze the most significant type in each novel.

Bystanders as Assistants

In Nancy Garden's *Endgame*, Gray is verbally, emotionally, and physically tortured by Zorro and his fellow jocks at Greenford High School. Victimized in middle school, Gray experiences increased abuse in his new high school. He feels trapped, with no support systems at home or school. Gray's father is unsympathetic to his son's torture and contributes to it by shaming him for preferring music over more masculine interests, such as hunting. Teachers and administrators ignore the signs of Gray's relentless tortures, such as poor grades and isolation, and his classmates laugh at him. In addition, Zorro, the instigator of most of Gray's tortures, is willingly and enthusiastically aided by other school jocks who mercilessly abuse not only Gray but also his only friend, Ross. Seeing little active help from anyone, Gray ultimately turns to an atrocious act of violence to end the continual cruelty.

Simon in Gail Giles's *Shattering Glass* is overcome by his tormentors. Rob and his posse of friends all hate computer geek Simon for various unsubstantiated reasons and scheme to set him up

FIGURE 1. Contemporary YA Novels with Bystander Roles

Book	Author	Acts of Violence	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Bystander(s)	Bystander Role(s)	Outcome
<i>Endgame</i>	Nancy Garden	School shooting	Zorro and his jock friends	Gray	Father, Zorro's friends	Assistants	Four deaths
<i>Shattering Glass</i>	Gail Giles	Hate, murder	Rob and his posse	Simon Glass	Young, Coop, Bobster	Assistants	Death
<i>The Battle of Jericho</i>	Sharon M. Draper	Initiation hazing	Warriors	Initiates, Dana	Members of the Warriors of Distinction	Reinforcers	Tragedy and death
<i>Inexcusable</i>	Chris Lynch	Maiming, destruction of property, rape	Keir and his buddies	Football player, Gigi	Football team and friends	Reinforcers	Violence and self-denial
<i>Bang!</i>	Sharon G. Flake	Drive-by shootings, abandonment in the wild	Adolescents shooting; Mann's father	Mann's brother, Mann, Kee-lee	Mother, friends	Reinforcers	Crime and tragedy
<i>Rucker Park Setup</i>	Paul Volponi	Murder	Greene	J.R.	Mackey	Outsider	Death for J.R.
<i>Shooter</i>	Walter Dean Myers	School shooting and suicide	Leonard Gray	Brad Williams (bully), Leonard Gray	Cameron and Carla	Outsider	Death and suicide
<i>Trigger</i>	Susan Vaught	Shooting, attempted suicide	Jersey	Jersey	Parents, friends	Defender	Tragedy, but survival
<i>The Brimstone Journals</i>	Ron Koertge	Plans to kill multiple students in school	Boyd	Multiple high school students		Defenders	Boyd put in jail and students' lives saved
<i>Whale Talk</i>	Chris Crutcher	Bullying, murder	Mike Barbour	Chris Coughlin	T. J. Jones	Defender	Victory and tragedy
<i>The Misfits</i>	James Howe	Name calling, taunting	Kevin Hennessey and other students	Addie, Bobby, Joe, Skeezie, and other students	Addie, Bobby, Joe, Skeezie	Defenders	Change of attitude and acceptance of others

as the most popular guy in the school so that they can then humiliate him. The plan backfires when Simon realizes what is happening and plays his own game with Rob. Ultimately, Simon is overcome by Rob's assistants who contribute by not only supporting Rob's plan but also by further hurting Simon. Once again, no one intervenes when Rob and his friends take revenge after Simon uncovers the secrets of their tragic lives.

Gray and Simon try to deal with single-minded bullies with multiple active assistants who set about to humiliate and shame their victims. Both boys receive minimal support from friends or family, leading them to conclude that their only defense is violence. In Gray's case the tragic outcome is physical while Simon attempts a kind of psychological violence that ends with his destruction.

Bystanders as Reinforcers

When Jericho in Sharon M. Draper's *The Battle of Jericho* is invited to pledge for the Warriors of Distinction, a prestigious high school club, he thinks life couldn't get any better. The pledges adopt the "all or none of us" creed, opening themselves up to hazing rituals that become increasingly abusive, especially toward Dana, the only female to ever pledge. Eddie continually pushes Dana to the limit, reinforced by the other Warriors as well as her pledge friends who do not step in to stop the physical and emotional cruelty. One initiate pays a tragic price as the pledging ritual ends.

Chris Lynch's Keir Sarafian in *Inexcusable* is a bully who truly believes that he is a good guy. His football buddies affirm this belief and reinforce his bullying through agreeing with his worldview and assisting his bullish behavior toward others. Keir is so convinced that he is a good guy that when he crosses the line with Gigi Boudakian, he is in total denial of the violent act he has committed against her. The assistants provide emotional and physical support for Keir's behavior while turning a blind eye to the damage he has done.

In Sharon G. Flake's *Bang!* thirteen-year-old Mann is trying to survive in an urban jungle. His brother, Jason, was shot at the age of seven, and Mann and his family are still grieving his death. To

toughen up Mann and his friend Kee-Lee, Mann's father turns to an ancient African coming-of-age ritual in which boys are sent into the wilderness to survive. Unchecked and reinforced by his wife and neighbors, Mann's father engages in bullying behavior that pushes the boys to commit acts of violence and crime. Knowing that their families are reinforcing Mann's father's actions, the boys feel abandoned and are faced with desertion and disaster.

The reinforcers in these novels give each bully confidence to continue his violent behavior. In addition, they reinforce the victim's feelings of abandonment and helplessness, resulting in tragic outcomes.

Bystanders as Outsiders

J.R. and Mackey in Paul Volponi's *Rucker Park Setup* are best buddies and serious street ballers with dreams of basketball scholarships to universities that will lead to major league basketball contracts. Yet Mackey betrays J.R., silently sitting by as an outsider while J.R. is murdered in cold blood. Mackey runs from the scene, never getting any help for his dying friend. Mackey silently supports the bully's behavior despite the pressure from Stove, J.R.'s father, who relentlessly pursues the truth about his son's death.

In Walter Dean Myers's *Shooter*, sixteen-year-old Leonard Gray leads his friends from innocent friendship to a tragic school shooting. Unaware of Len's deeply disturbed thoughts and feelings as a result of being bullied by Brad Williams, his friends Cameron Porter and Carla Evans silently sit by as Len's behavior becomes more and more bizarre. Starved for relationships, Cameron and Carla become outsiders following Len's lead in committing various crimes. Brad's constant taunting and assaults on Len and his friends push Len to thoughts of revenge. And, by his silent approval, Cameron allows Len's violent behavior to continue, eventually leading to a tragic murder-suicide.

Taking the outsider stance, Mackey, Cameron, and Carla support the acts of violence committed on and by their best friends. While their close relationships might have made a positive difference in the outcome, they all choose to silently approve of tragic events.

Bystanders as Defenders of the Victims

In Susan Vaught's *Trigger*, seventeen-year-old Jersey Hatch returns home after spending a year in a rehabilitation center for a self-inflicted brain injury. Jersey has no memory of the event and desperately tries to reconstruct what led to his attempted suicide, which somehow involves his former best friend, Todd. Returning to his high school proves difficult for Jersey as he is continuously bullied and taunted for reasons unknown to him. His defender is Leza, his younger sister. Leza escorts him to class, protects him from bullies, and shows Jersey much-needed compassion as he tries to heal his life. Because of Leza's continued support as a friend and a defender, Jersey is able to search for answers to difficult questions.

Written in the voices of fifteen high school students, Ron Koertge's *The Brimstone Journals* brings multiple perspectives of high school life. Amid the daily turmoil of the relationships, family issues, and school pressures, one sinister voice rises above the rest as Boyd makes a list of all the jocks, blacks, and homosexuals he plans to kill. Struggling with this terrifying knowledge, one student bravely goes to the authorities and stops the planned bloodshed. From a defender stance, this student saves the lives of many others and helps Boyd get the help he desperately needs.

One of the strongest defenders in young adult literature is T. J. Jones in Chris Crutcher's *Whale Talk*. Coming from a heritage of black, Japanese, and white ancestors, T. J. has developed a strong sense of justice. Despite his natural athletic ability, he avoids organized sports until his senior year, when a favorite English teacher invites him to organize a swim team at a school without a swimming pool. Not interested at first, he eventually sees it as an opportunity to get back at the jocks by forming a swim team of misfits including brain-damaged Chris Coughlin, who is bullied by Mike Barbour for wearing his dead brother's letter jacket. T. J.'s belief in and support of his teammates gives all of the boys renewed self-confidence and a sense of worth in the midst of personal hardships and struggles.

The Gang of Five, made up of Addie, Bobby, Skeezie, and Joe, with space for the other inevitable misfit, in James Howe's *The Misfits* takes on an entire school in a quest to end the vicious name calling at Paintbrush Falls Middle School. All misfits

themselves, they hold on to their strong friendships as they confront multiple kinds of bias through forming the No-Name Party in school elections. Through their understanding of the detrimental influence of wicked names, they bring a higher knowledge of the power of words to their classmates. Not only do their individual lives change, but their words also shed a much-needed light on the terrors of bully behavior.

The characters portrayed in these novels are average kids with problems of their own and yet they choose to make a stand against injustice. If we want to make a real difference in a world filled with bullies, this kind of behavior must be taught, discussed, and emulated.

Using Process Drama to Promote Awareness and Change

Quality young adult literature and process drama can be used to promote understanding and deal with bullying issues in our classrooms. Process drama is a powerful role-play and problem-solving activity that encourages the creation of "imaginary, unscripted, and spontaneous scenes" (Schneider and Jackson 38).

Drawing on Louise M. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading ("Literary"), process drama involves the participants interacting with the text and each other through taking on other perspectives as they solve significant problems from the text. In addition, process drama involves the students in active thinking strategies similar to those involved in reading. Students make text-to-self and text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann), are involved in active visualization (Wilhelm), and are engaged with quality literature that supports the "intellectual, emotional, and experiential" needs of adolescents (Rosenblatt, *Literature* 25).

In process drama participants must spontaneously respond to problems from a given perspective in a specific situation. Process drama provides a safe place to teach about the roles of bystanders in school violence because the situation allows for open discussion and the development of multiple perspectives.

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FIGURE 2. Setting and Roles for Process Drama

Setting	A community meeting called by the principal of a high school in response to a shooting that took place on school grounds
Teacher Role	Principal (taken on by the classroom teacher)
Student Roles (to be more clearly defined by individual students)	<p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What grade and classes do you teach? > What do you do before school and between classes? <p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What grade are you in? > What kind of student are you? > What is your relationship to the students involved? <p>Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > How many children do you have at the school? > What are their ages? > How involved are you with the school? <p>Community Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What business are you involved in? > How close is your business to the school? > How are students from the school involved in your business?

Figure 2 lists the setting and roles for process drama episodes created for use with young adult novels dealing with school violence, in particular, *Endgame*. Episodes One and Two lead the students through a discussion in which they take on multiple perspectives about the violent act committed at the end of the book. Students then devise a plan of action to prevent these kinds of bullying and acts of violence from recurring.

Episode One

Divide students into groups of four or five, give them slips of paper with numbers (1 = Teacher, 2 = Student, and so on), and ask them to more clearly define their roles (see fig. 2). Be sure all roles are included in each group.

Tell the students that they are to assume their chosen roles as soon as you finish giving directions. Once you step into the role of the school principal, students should assume their roles and maintain them until you (as principal) end the episode.

FIGURE 3. Directions for Group Discussion

Community Forum on School Violence

Please discuss the following questions with the members of your group. Create an overhead of your ideas that you will ultimately share with the entire meeting. Remember, all ideas are worth sharing!

To Think About:

- > What effect did the recent incident have on you personally?
- > What effect did it have on those around you? Other family members, children, friends, people you work with?
- > What is your personal responsibility when it comes to this issue?
- > What is our responsibility as a community?

Create a Plan of Action with Your Group:

- > What can and should we do about this problem?
- > Please write a plan of action for dealing with bullying and school violence in our community. Think in terms of short- and long-term decisions.

The book that students read provides the context for the process drama. In your role as principal, tell students that they have been called together for a community meeting, and their goal is to address the consequences of the recent violent act committed at their school. They also need to discuss ways to avoid a recurrence of this type of violence.

Give groups directions for discussion and eventual creation of a plan of action (see fig. 3). Encourage them to think in terms of short- and long-term possibilities and be sure to allow time for questions.

Episode Two

Begin the second episode when groups are finished with their action plans. Each group should present the plan and the class should conclude with a whole-group discussion. After the discussion, end the drama.

Figure 4 has student roles and plans of actions created by a group of undergraduate students when they participated in this process drama.

What the Process Drama Revealed

Discussion during the process drama revealed that many students had a stereotypical and simplistic understanding of what is involved in effecting change in schools. Some in the role of parents or community members simply thought that metal detectors and a strong police presence would eliminate any

FIGURE 4. Sample Student Roles and Plans of Action

Student Roles	Teachers:	Ninth- and tenth-grade special education teacher—lunch duty Tenth- and eleventh-grade AP English teacher—hall monitor All-grade gym teacher—bus duty before and after school	
	Students:	Ninth-grade average student new to school and not acquainted with those involved Tenth-grade special education student forced to be at the meeting with mother, didn't know students involved Twelfth-grade college-bound student, friend of both students involved	
	Parents:	Two children—ninth and twelfth grade—not involved in school at all One child—eleventh grade—employed by school as lunch worker One child (special ed.)—very involved with school activities	
	Community Members:	Owner of local ice cream shop located across the street from school, students are in business daily Owner of local pizza shop located across the street from school, students are in business daily Owner of local clothing store located a few blocks from the school, students are rarely in store	
Plan of Action	<i>Short-Term Plans</i>		<i>Long-Term Plans</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Regular, random locker checks > All-school assembly with relevant guest speaker to talk about bullying behavior > All students required to meet with a school counselor to discuss bullying issues > All teachers should be encouraged to help students feel comfortable at school > Anonymous comment box available for students > Encourage staff communication within school > Teachers should make their presence known before, during, and after school 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Cameras installed on exterior of school > Metal detectors installed at doors > Hire police to walk hallways > Begin teaching about bullying early in students' school career (i.e., kindergarten) > Increase number of full-time counselors > Create before- and after-school activities with volunteer workers > Write an effective zero tolerance policy > Create an anonymous hotline for student and staff use

further violence. When confronted by others, particularly those in the role of students, with the high level of covert bullying going on in the classrooms—many times directly under the noses of teachers—parents and community members quickly realized that this isn't a problem that can be solved by simply increasing funding. At times, the exchanges became highly personal as a parent shared his or her heart-break at listening to a child with special needs speak about the daily taunting.

Students willingly took on other perspectives and got involved in some creative problem solving as they realized that the story in *Endgame* could become a reality in their schools. Aware of the acts of school violence reported in the daily newspaper, they seemed to understand the importance of addressing this issue in an imaginative and realistic manner. While there is no way of knowing if the reading of the book and participating in the process drama made a difference in their personal choice of bystander stances, we know that literature is a powerful tool for change. If just one of these students, just one time, chooses to be a

defender and make a difference in a potentially violent event, the time spent in reading, discussion, and problem solving was valuable.

Supporting Action against Bullying

Students can't stop the bullying they experience or witness by themselves. They need caring adults at home, in the school, and in community programs committed to breaking this cycle of violence wherever they see it and whenever they hear about it. Bullying happens in every school. School personnel must be proactive in dealing with all kinds of bullying—physical, verbal, emotional, and relational. Educators need to be vigilant in addressing all incidents of bullying. Too many students come to school knowing that their day will be filled with misery, fear, and confusion. And yet, by law, they must be there. Will they be the bully, the bullied, or the bystander? How will they handle the pressures?

The question we educators face is this: Who do we want our students to model? The students

who stood by watching Archie beat Jerry senseless or T. J. Jones as he stood up for the misfits on his swimming team? In this era of pressure to perform at higher levels, we must make our classrooms safe places for learning. For far too many students, the stress of survival in our classrooms has become a bigger issue than the stress of passing some mandated test. If we want to effect real change in our students' lives, we need to bring our students face-to-face with the reality of bullying and challenge them to take a stand for that which is right.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Addressing bullying is crucial in schools and in the classroom. Baer and Glasgow share young adult texts that can be used to get the conversations started. Once students, teachers, and administrators have discussed bullying, invite the students to share what they have learned. "Campaigning for Fair Use: Public Service Announcements on Copyright Awareness" introduces students to public service announcements (PSAs) along with fair use and copyright. Working together, students craft PSAs to be broadcast over the school's public address system. Bully prevention is a perfect topic. Work can also be published as podcasts on the Internet. Students tap research and persuasive writing strategies as they design announcements for an audience of their peers. http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=939