SECONDARY LESSON PLAN

Rewriting the Bystander Narrative

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: 6 - 12

SUBJECT: English / Language Arts and/or Advisory

LENGTH OF TIME: This lesson was designed for a standard class period of 50 minutes. Adaptations and extensions for a block period are included at the bottom of this lesson.

GOAL: To increase students' empathy and compassion for those who are targeted with name-calling and bullying, and their capacity to demonstrate ally behavior.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will explore their own roles in incidents of bullying by evaluating the bystander effect depicted in literature.
- Students will analyze different responses to bullying behavior and the impacts of those behaviors.
- Students will describe strategies to intervene in bias-based bullying, demonstrating how individual allyship directly contributes to a safer, more inclusive school environment.

EDUCATORS' NOTES:

- **The Core Concept:** Literature provides a safe distance to evaluate real-world hostile school climates. By analyzing the bystander effect in the poem "HUNGRY GAMES," students can explore how silence normalizes identity-based bullying and appearance-based harassment. This lesson guides them from passive observation into active, strategic allyship in order to improve the climate of the school.
- **Cross-Curricular Adaptability:** While this lesson focuses on English Language Arts and Advisory in particular, see the bottom of this lesson for differentiation suggestions and cross-curricular connections.

MATERIALS

Lesson Needs & Instructions

- **"HUNGRY GAMES" PowerPoint**
- Copies of the poem "HUNGRY GAMES" by Lisa Fipps
- **Printed "Four Corners" signs** to be hung in four corners of the classroom.
- Chart paper and markers
- Room arrangement suitable for movement

Welcoming Schools Resources

Be prepared to address identity-based bullying and stop discriminatory comments. These resources on the **Welcoming Schools Bullying Prevention page** will help you understand the national landscape of school climate & bullying, support you in responding to bullying, and guide you on preventing it. In addition, Welcoming Schools has resources on navigating pushback received from staff and other school stakeholders.

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THE LESSON

1) THE HOOK: “SEA OF STUDENTS” (10 MIN)

Distribute the poem “HUNGRY GAMES” to class. Ask them to focus on how they would feel if they were part of the “sea of students” observing what happens to the narrator in the poem, and then read the poem aloud. Ask students to re-read the poem and underline or highlight any words or phrases that helped them figure out how they would feel.

Then, have students discuss two questions: “What emotions might people in the 'sea of students' feel?” and “How do you think the narrator feels when the ‘sea of students parts’ and ignores what is happening?” Be sure to emphasize how the silence of the parting crowd isolates the target and normalizes the bullying behavior. In addition, highlight why the narrator is targeted (bias, appearance, identity) as well as the setting of the bullying (hallway or unstructured environment).

- **Slides Resource: Slides 3-5**

2) DIRECT INSTRUCTION: INTERRUPTING THE BYSTANDER EFFECT (10 MIN)

Share the definition of “Bystander Effect” and how it was demonstrated in the poem.

- **Slides Resource: Slide 6**

Then, explain that the bystander effect can be interrupted in at least four ways that can help the entire school. Emphasize that there is no one “right” way to be an upstander. The “right” way is dependent upon the exact scenario as well as the identities, comfort levels, and safety of each person involved.

- **Slides Resource: Slide 7**

Using the exact scenario from the poem (Enemy Number 3 shouting, "Thar she blows!" and mocking the narrator's size in a crowded hallway), ask students to choose which of the four labeled corners represents an ally action they would feel most comfortable taking if they were a student in that specific hallway. Have students move to their chosen corner.

Give students one or two minutes to turn and talk to other students who chose the same corner. Invite a couple of students from different corners to say why they chose to stand there. Ask open-ended questions like “What are some of the reasons you chose one corner versus another? And are there times you feel unsafe being an ally?”



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3) GUIDED PRACTICE: BRAINSTORMING ALLYSHIP IN ACTION (10 MIN)

Ask students to return to their seats. Acknowledge that there are many ways to be an ally depending on the situation, but the key message is that when more students who witness bullying take some kind of ally action, the whole school climate improves. On chart paper, brainstorm specific ways to be an ally in the "HUNGRY GAMES" hallway scenario:

- **If you ignore the situation or move away:** Why would someone choose this? Does doing this in the moment keep people from taking other actions?
- **If intervening:** What exactly do you say to the aggressor to set a boundary without escalating the fight?
- **If talking in private:** How do you approach the narrator later to check in and offer support?
- **If seeking adult help:** Which specific adults in the building are safest to go to?

4) COLLABORATIVE CLOSURE: REWRITING THE NARRATIVE (15 MIN)

Divide students into small groups of 3 or 4. Then, instruct each group to rewrite the second half of the "HUNGRY GAMES" poem. Their task is to transform the "sea of students" from passive bystanders who "crash left or right to hug the hallways" into active allies. The rewritten poem must incorporate at least two of the ally strategies brainstormed on the chart paper (e.g., someone intervening directly, or someone stepping out of the crowd to support the narrator and walk with her).

- **Slides Resource: Slide 8**

Conclude class by asking at least one group to read their revised ending to the class, highlighting how shifting from a bystander to an ally impacts the hostile climate of the school.

5) INDEPENDENT REFLECTION: INDIVIDUAL EXIT TICKET (5 MIN)

Provide students quiet time to think about the exit ticket prompt: Think back to the "sea of students" in the hallway. If you witness a similar situation in our school this week, what is one specific ally action you feel confident taking to support a targeted peer? If time allows, have students share one idea from their exit ticket with a partner.

- **Slides Resource: Slide 9**

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HOW TO ADAPT FOR A BLOCK PERIOD (90 MIN)

Metaphor Decoding and Translation Lab

Turn the initial poem reading into a deep-dive literary translation lab. Before reading the poem, provide a "Pop Culture & Metaphor" Visual Glossary to ensure the core metaphors are accessible. Show an image of an "arena" and explain "Katnissing" (trying to survive a hostile, competitive environment while being watched). Explicitly front-load the phrase "Thar she blows!" and the word "blubber," explaining these historical whaling terms are being used as a cruel metaphor to body-shame the narrator. Next, help students bridge the gap between this figurative imagery and the literal school climate using a "Literal Translation" T-Chart.

Provide a chart with figurative lines on the left (e.g., "I spot mutations—part piranha... part hyena with their howling laughter") and have students write what is literally happening in the school hallway on the right (e.g., "I see groups of students acting like cruel predators, laughing loudly and looking at me aggressively"). This extended analysis explicitly deconstructs the severity of bias-based bullying and bystander complicity before students rewrite the scene.

Gallery Walk of Upstander Poetry

Turn the poem rewriting activity into a gallery walk. After groups rewrite the second half of the "HUNGRY GAMES" poem to include active allies, have them write their final versions on large chart paper and post them around the room. Students will conduct a "Gallery Walk," circulating with sticky notes to identify and label the specific ally actions (e.g., "Intervening Directly," "Talking in Private," "Seeking Adult Help") they see depicted in their peers' work. This allows students to analyze multiple intervention strategies and build community without the risk of retraumatizing targeted students through acting out bullying scenarios.

Pro-Upstander Posters

After sharing their rewritten poems, transition the class from literary analysis to real-world application. Have students use their devices (or provide printed copies) to locate the building or district's official bullying policy. Students will analyze the policy to see how "bystander intervention" and reporting are formally addressed. Then, students will create Pro-Upstander Posters that translate the district's formal policy into student-friendly, actionable advice. These campaigns should combine the official reporting steps with the concrete ally strategies (like direct intervention phrases or safely seeking adult help) they brainstormed, empowering their peers to intervene safely while knowing their actions are supported by the school's policy.

HOW TO ADAPT FOR OTHER SUBJECTS & DIVERSE LEARNERS:

- **Jigsaw Differentiation for Diverse Learners:** To support diverse learners, English Language Learners (ELLs), or students who require additional processing time to decode figurative language, extend the whole-class poem analysis with a Jigsaw activity. This allows students to focus deeply on a single metaphor while utilizing peer-to-peer support.

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Start by dividing the class into mixed-ability groups of three. Assign each student in the “home group” one of three specific sections of the "Hungry Games" poem: the animal metaphors (piranhas, wolverines, hyenas), the arena survival metaphor ("Katnissing"), or the physical actions of the bystanders (the sea parting, crashing to the walls).

Give them a few minutes to read their assigned text independently. Then have students leave their “home group” to gather with the other students in the room who were assigned the exact same text. In these "expert groups," students will collaboratively work to translate the figurative language into the literal events happening in the school hallway. This allows students to pool their knowledge, check their understanding with peers, and ensure everyone has a strong, accurate translation of the imagery without feeling overwhelmed by the entire poem.

Finally, students return to their “home groups.” Each “expert” is given 3 to 4 minutes to present their assigned section, explain the literal meaning behind the metaphor, and discuss how the figurative language helps them make sense of the text. By the end of the share-out, all students will have collaboratively decoded the hostile school climate depicted across the entire poem.

- **Art & Graphic Design:** Students create posters and/or digital PSAs to foster community, promote upstander behavior, and practice their skills.
  - **Activity:** In recognition of National Bullying Prevention Month, students will design "Pro-Upstander" posters or digital PSAs using core graphic design principles. Students will create a visual campaign that explicitly challenges the bystander effect. These artworks can be displayed in school hallways or on social media to provide peers with safe, actionable intervention strategies to actively prevent bias-based bullying.

- **Biology and/or Psychology:** Students can learn about the brain and studies related to the bystander effect.
  - **Activity:** Students can learn how the brain's sympathetic nervous system can trigger a "freeze" or "herd" response when witnessing a social threat like bullying, which contributes to the bystander effect. They can also learn about significant studies on the bystander effect, such as the John M. Darley and Bibb Latané 1968 study.

- **Math/Data Literacy:** Students can explore data collection methodologies, sampling bias, and the construction of mathematical indices by analyzing the survey design, scoring systems, and respondent demographics of a national school climate study.
  - **Activity:** Using the **HRC National Educator Survey on School Climate** and Bullying, students can analyze the study's sample demographics, calculate the overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ educators, and discuss how this impacts survey results. Students can also examine how researchers quantified qualitative data by breaking down the survey's "policy index,” which scored restrictive school policies from 0 to 2 to create a composite numerical score ranging from 0 to 12. Students can apply this math concept by designing their own weighted scale or index to quantify and measure a social construct, such as bystander intervention rates or hallway safety, within their own school.

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