

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #51: Bullying

Bullying has been a current event in Anchorage recently, but it is not really news since we see it happening on a day-to-day basis in middle schools. There are a lot of tools to help us combat it such as conflict resolution, peer mediators, asset training, and middle school teaming. Bullying brochures were distributed to parents this week at all the middle schools during conferences. In a recent correspondence to all of us, Carol Comeau referenced a Psych Savvy called "Battling Bullying." You can access this PDF file at:

www.asdk12.org/depts/sped/savvy/Feb01.pdf

Every school also has a curriculum called *Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to Prevent Violence*. Ask your counselors about this guide. It includes lots of lesson ideas and teaches kids how to use a four-step problem solving process:

- Step #1 - Keep cool
- Step #2 - Size up the situation
- Step #3 - Think it through
- Step #4 - Do the right thing

The Revealers by Doug Wilhelm

Perhaps as language arts teachers, we can help address bullying through literature. A brand new young adult book that would make an excellent read aloud is called *The Revealers* by Doug Wilhelm. The chapters are short, the

dialogue is engaging, and the situations are very real. The setting is in a middle school. As with any book, you will want to read this first to get comfortable with it. You and your students may be uncomfortable with the explicit profanity used when the author describes the various bullying incidences. They are very realistic. Read about the book at:

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0374362556/qid=1076630841/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-5447749-4589732?v=glance&s=books

The Girls by Amy Goldman Koss

Wendy Leseman, co-librarian at Hanshew, suggests a short book called *The Girls* by Amy Goldman Koss. Wendy tells me that this book deals with the issue of bullying within a middle school clique of girls, which often gets less attention than the physical bullying we typically think about. Each chapter in this book is told from the point of view of one of five girls. The alternating points of view also makes it a powerful choice for analyzing this literary device. You can read about this book at:

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0142300330/qid=1081285895/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-5762227-7968139?v=glance&s=books



Carol Hurst's Children's Literature

If you have never taken the time to explore Carol Hurst's Children's Literature web site, this would be a good opportunity to do so. I often use her web site as a reference tool because she is so thorough and well respected in the field of children's literature. She includes thematic connections, and indeed, I was able to find book recommendations on bullying.

www.carolhurst.com/subjects/bullies.html

Another Online Resource

Below is another good resource for titles related to bullying. You will find leveled books at this site from picture book references all the way up to advanced adolescent literature. At the end of the web site are some links to instructional materials for teachers.

<http://elmhurst.edu/~susanss/childlit2002/Dhamer/Bullies-Found-In-Children's-Literature.html>

Bargain by A.G. Guthrie

One of my favorite selections in the *8th grade Elements of Literature* (Holt) is *Bargain* by A. G. Guthrie. This story is set in the days of the Wild West. The plot is well crafted and will give your students lots of opportunity to practice making inferences. There is a theme of bullying throughout the story. Slade has an immediate dislike for Mr. Baumer because he is an immigrant. Students will be able to find lots of detailed evidence of this bullying and will be intrigued with Mr. Baumer's response to it. Students will be able to write literary essays analyzing the main characters' motives. Did Mr. Baumer murder Slade, or was Slade to blame for his own death?

My students loved putting these characters on trial. To get more students involved, you might try another strategy called Character Improvisation. Put your students into groups of 5 or 6. Each group takes on the persona of an assigned character from the story. Let groups talk to one another about situations from the story. During the course of the improvisation, any student sitting at the group can respond as that particular character. With students taking turns at responding, more students get involved rather than just the outspoken ones.

Anansi's Riding Horse

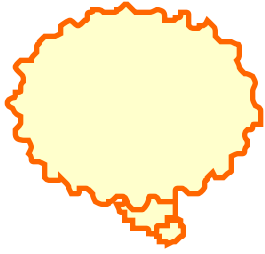
Not wanting to leave out 7th grade teachers, I asked Marcia Indahl, department chair at Hanshew, for a selection from the blue *Elements of Literature* (Holt). Her recommendation is to use *Anansi's Riding Horse*.

"It is an African folktale starring that lovable spider, Anansi. He is weak and puny, and Linda laughs at him. She's in love with Brer Tiger, who is gorgeous - orange and black stripes, rippling muscles, a booming voice. It is subtly very humorous and reminds me totally of middle school kids - how the girls love the handsome, muscular boys and ignore the smart, weak ones. In the end, Anansi tricks Brer Tiger and comes out on top. This is a light-hearted way to treat the subject rather than the traditional depressing realistic fiction."

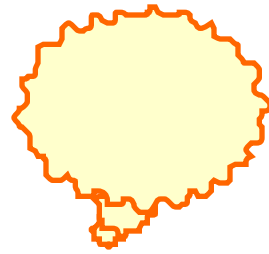
The important thing is to get students talking about the issue of bullying. There are many cooperative learning strategies available to use, but one of my favorites is Think-Pair-Share. [Attached is a form](#) for you to post that describes the steps with simple graphics. (This idea was borrowed from *High Point*, a reading intervention program published by Hampton-Brown.)



Think...

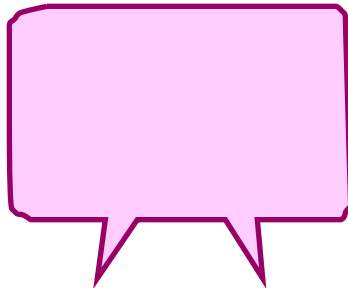


A



B

Pair



A

B

Share!

A

B

