



ENGAGING STUDENTS WITH CHRIS CRUTCHER'S SPORTS-RELATED YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

NCTE 2012 Annual Convention

THE INTERSECTION OF SPORT, EDUCATION, AND SOCIETY

IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Bullying in Sports and Education: Learning to Listen through Whale Talk

Keeping students engaged in literature and discussion is something that every good teacher strives to do, but occasionally we need a little help. The typical high school student has about one million things they would rather do than analyze literature. However, it is possible for these two opposites to work together. By targeting literature to a student's interest the teacher can teach necessary skills while keeping the students engaged. However, most sports novels lack real content and overcompensate with the details of the sport. Chris Crutcher's books are a wonderful exception to this norm. Crutcher uses sports as an outlet to get students interested in reading, but then supplements this interest with incredible writing. He has wonderful characters, incredibly designed plots, and a stunning way with words. His stories are full of rich themes to be analyzed and big issues to be discussed. He combines his personal experiences as a family therapist with his enthusiasm for sports, and the result is a powerfully honest depiction of the teenage years. Thanks to authors like Chris Crutcher teachers can teach through sports novels without having to sacrifice quality literature.

Chris Crutcher's Books and the Sports they feature

- Ironman- Triathlon-Running, Swimming, Cycling
- Running Loose- Football
- Stotan- Swimming
- The Crazy Horse Electric Game- Baseball
- Chinese Handcuffs- Basketball, Motorcycling
- Athletic Shorts-This is a collection of six short stories each featuring a different character and sport.
- Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes- Swimming
- Whale Talk- Swimming
- The Sledding Hill-Sledding
- Deadline- Football, Running

Our Focus Today

Today's discussion will focus on one of Crutcher's books, *Ironman*, and how well this novel can be used in the English classroom. This packet contains information about the book as well as discussion questions, activities, and assessments. While the discussion questions and assessments are limited to this particular book, the activities could be used with almost any novel or short story. We thank you for participating and encourage you to contact us with any questions or comments about the presentation.

Whale Talk

Synopsis

There's bad news and good news about the Cutter High School swim team. The bad news is that they don't have a pool. The good news is that only one of them can swim anyway.

A group of misfits brought together by T. J. Jones (the J is redundant) to find their places in a school that has no place for them, the Cutter All Night Mermen struggle to carve out their own turf. T. J. is convinced that a varsity letter jacket--unattainable for most, exclusive, revered, the symbol (as far as T. J. is concerned) of all that is screwed up at Cutter High--will be an effective carving tool. He's right. He's also wrong.

Still, it's always the quest that counts. And the bus on which the Mermen travel to swim meets--piloted by Icko, the permanent resident of All, Night Fitness--soon becomes the cocoon inside which they gradually allow themselves to talk, to fit, to bloom.

Chris Crutcher is in top form with a cast of characters--adults, children, and teenagers--fighting for dignity in a world where tragedy and comedy dance side by side, where a moment's inattention can bring lifelong heartache, and where true acceptance is the only prescription for what ails us.

Reviews

"This being Crutcher, the action is fast and furious, the language foul, the victims' stories heart-rending, the climax violent and the themes thought-provoking."

~Chicago Tribune

"In the hands of a lesser storyteller, the tale would fall apart under its own weight. But Crutcher (*Ironman*, 1995, etc) juggles the disparate elements of his plot with characteristic energy, crafting a compulsively readable story that rings true with genuine feeling and is propelled by exhilarating swimming action to an end that is both cataclysmic and triumphant."

~Kirkus

"Crutcher offers an unusual yet resonant mixture of black comedy and tragedy that lays bare the superficiality of the high school scene. The book's shocking climax will force readers to re-examine their own values and may cause them to alter their perception of individuals pegged as 'losers.'"

~Publisher's Weekly

"Crutcher's superior gifts as a storyteller and his background as a working therapist combine to make magic in Whale Talk. The thread of truth in his fiction reminds us that heroes can come in any shape, color, ability or size, and friendship can bridge nearly any divide. A truly exceptional book."

~*Washington Post*

Awards & Honors

2005 ALA Popular Paperbacks for YA

2002 ABC Children's Booksellers Choices Award

2002 Washington State Book Award

2002 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award

2002 Outstanding Sports Book Award/YA

ALA Best Book for YA

TLA Tayshas List

New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age

ALA Top 10 Best Books for YA

Book Sense 76 Pick

This information is cited from Chris Crutcher's website: <http://www.chriscrutcher.com/whale-talk-2001.html>

Additional Information

MAJOR Characters

Character Description/Development

T.J Jones– T.J. is the main character in Whale Talk and is the narrator of this story. His name is The Tao (pronounced Dow) Jones, but goes by T.J. We see everything through his eyes. He is always watching out for the little guy and is extremely good at physical sports, all the teams wanting him to join, but he refuses. He does not like taking orders from other people, so he realizes he would not do well on a team. T.J. was adopted when he was very young, about two years old. He is usually caring and helpful, except when it's dealing with people who are disrespectful or cruel.

Rich Marshall– Rich Marshall is a cruel character who was once an elite athlete at Cutter, so he was popular and well known by teachers. After graduating, he takes some of the athletes under his wing, like Mike Barbour. Rich drinks and has a big problem with his anger and rage. He is Heidi's stepfather and a father to Alicia and his twin sons. He usually takes his anger out on Heidi, telling her that if she wasn't black then she would be beautiful and loved. He abusive and horribly mean.

Heidi Marshall– Heidi is Rich's stepdaughter. She is a small, sweet five year old girl who's mind and spirit has been corrupted through the abuse of her stepfather. She is always scared and always wants to be as perfect as she can be so that her stepdad will love her. Everything Rich tells her, she believes, causing her to inflict self harm on herself by trying to change her skin color, but instead just rubbing her skin raw. She is sweet and innocent, but there is no way for her to escape this harm until the end of the book.

Icko– Icko is the swim teams bus driver, assistant manager and temporary coach. He is trying to earn money to pay for his son's college tuition, so he doesn't really have a place to live at the moment. He is helpful and doesn't like when Dan uses large words.

Chris Coughlin– Chris Coughlin is a large and important character. His story is emotional and very touching. He is mentally disabled after his mom's boyfriend wrapped his face in saranwrap to get him to stop crying. His stepbrother, who is now dead, was a legendary athlete at Cutter High. Mike Barbour and his friends give Chris a lot of crap when he wears his dead step-brother's letterman jacket. He is caring and sweet and just wants to be accepted.

Mike Barbour– Mike doesn't have very good values and can be abusive. He is mean and is very good friends with Rich Marshall. He picks on Chris Coughlin and hits his now ex-girlfriend Kristen.

Andy Mott– Andy Mott is a funny, but complicated character. He doesn't care what anybody thinks about him because he's probably been through the most out of any character in the book. He has a prosthetic leg and was raped by his mother's boyfriend, but still manages to make people crack a smile, even when it seems like he doesn't want to. He doesn't care about rules and gets a lot of detentions, but he doesn't care. He doesn't like when people pick on others and he can be very aggressive if he needs to be. He is a very outgoing and interesting character.

Jackie Craig– Jackie is a character that is on the swim team, but he doesn't ever talk. He barely mutters a word all season long until after the last meet when he vocalizes to the team that he is going to miss them a lot. He seems like a nice character.

Dan Hole– Dan is a very smart guy, who cares mostly about school. His vocabulary is extremely immense and he can barely go a sentence without sounding like a walking thesaurus. The swim team, Icko in particular, come up with a way to get him to stop talking like a genius. Every time he says a word that Icko doesn't understand/know, he has to do ten pushups. He is a fun character and adds a lot to this book.

Tay-Roy– Tay-Roy is a muscular and good looking member of the swim team. He is a ladies man. He is very sweet and caring and is a good boyfriend to Kristen after she breaks up with Mike Barbour.

Simon– Simon is on the swim team and he is extremely overweight, making it very hard for him to be a good swimmer. Above all of that, Simon is a very caring and sympathetic character.

Mr. Simet– Mr. Simet is T.J.'s English teacher and is the swim team's coach. He used to be a swimmer, so he makes a very good swim coach. He is very understanding when dealing with his team.

Carly– Carly doesn't have a huge role, but she is T.J.'s girlfriend and the first real girlfriend he's ever had. She is witty, caring and independent.

T.J.'s Dad– T.J.'s dad loves motorbikes and whales and looks scary and intimidating, but in reality he is sweet, loving, intelligent and kind. He used to work for a delivery company and after making a delivery one day, he forgot to check under his truck before he left. He ended up killing a small boy

and would never forget that day. It haunts him for the rest of his life, but really helped him realize to not take anything for granted and to always help out when he can. He is very compassionate.

T.J's Mom– T.J.'s mom is a lawyer for child abuse. She is always there to help T.J. out when he has a problem and she is very understanding.

Kyle Couples– Kyle Couples seems just like his dad, T.J.'s dad. T.J. and him meet at the beginning of summer. They realize they are step–brothers and by the sound of it, it seems like they are going to try to get to know each other better.

Willis– Willis was a great athlete and is the biological father to Heidi Marshall. He was in an accident and became paralyzed. Soon, he realized he couldn't raise a daughter and his condition and he had his brother and friends help him run away.

Glenda– Glenda is T.J.'s biological mom. She did drugs a lot and was a very negative parent in T.J.'s life. She quickly realized that she couldn't take care of a child and gave him up for adoption to T.J.'s adoptive parents.

Settings

Whale Talk takes place in a town in Washington, U.S. The setting moves briefly out of the town when the swim team has their meets. The main setting would be T.J's house, the bus for the swim meets and Cutter High.

Common Themes

· Identity	· Time (the past)	· Moving Forward
· Balance	· Breaking Points	· Responsibility
· Justice	· Finish Lines/Goals	· Honesty
· Mercy	· Pride	· Commitment
· Perseverance	· Tolerance	· Motivation
· Endurance	· Teamwork	· Humiliation
· Abuse	· Pain	· Courage
· Humor	· Anger	· Love/Divorce
· Good Social Behavior	· Connections	· Adoption

Discussion Starters

Chapter 1

1. TJ describes himself as “black. And Japanese. And white” (1). How might this blend of ethnicities impact the development of his personal identity? How much does your race impact your identity?
2. TJ’s identity is further challenged by his adopted status. How much should family impact your sense of self? How might TJ’s adoptive status impact his personal identity?

3. Desire for belonging emerges throughout Whale Talk. How might TJ's ethnicity and adoptive status impact his desire for (or feeling of) belonging?
4. His adoptive parents believe the absence of TJ's mother is because she felt "the separation was too painful" (3). What role do you believe a biological parent has to a biological child?
5. On page 8, we learn that TJ's name is "The Tao." Tao (or Dao) is a Chinese word meaning 'way', 'path', 'route', and sometimes is applied to mean a belief system. How might TJ's name foreshadow his role in the story?
6. What type of relationship does TJ have with his English teacher, Mr. Simet? Is that a traditional relationship? Explain.
7. Is Mr. Simet like any teacher you've had before? What might make him a good teacher, based on the characteristics demonstrated in this chapter?

Chapter 2

1. Look at TJ's flier on page 30. How does TJ try to play up the new team? Explain how the words he chooses would raise interest in the swim team.
2. Pretend you are writing an advertisement to be published in the New York Times and rewrite the flier title to make it more formal. Then explain how your version would appeal to a different demographic than TJ's version.
3. Characterize TJ's interactions with Chris. How would you define their relationship?

Chapter 3

1. TJ tries to save a deer in this chapter, but ends up with the deer's blood all over him. He wears the bloody t-shirt for a full week at school. What do we learn about TJ from this experience?
2. In Chapter 3, TJ tries to enlist others for his swim team. What are his motivations for talking to these students? Is it a selfish or caring motivation? Explain.

Chapter 4

1. Explain why Georgia and TJ get along so well.
2. Compare and contrast Carly with TJ. How are they similar and how are they different?
3. As we learn with his success at water skiing, TJ is a determined person. How have you see this determination so far in the novel, and how do you see it playing a part in the future events?

Chapter 5

1. In chapter 5, TJ recounts a conversation he had with his Dad about his father's past. Characterize the word choice and tone that Mr. Jones uses when speaking to his son. How does that inform our understanding of their relationship?
2. The baby incident is pretty gruesome. How is this story told in this chapter? Emotionally? Detached? Explain how the story is told and how that helps the reader understand the impact of the incident on Mr. Jones.

3. How did you feel after reading about the play therapy with Heidi? Explain thoroughly.
4. Crutcher uses raw language in this chapter– language that isn't typically acceptable in school-approved novels. Why is this raw language absolutely essential to this chapter?
5. How do you feel about Alicia staying with Rich? Are you more angry with Rich, or with Alicia, for the state of their relationship and the impact on the children?

Chapter 6

1. A conversation with Rich inspires TJ to swim his hardest at practice that day. How has TJ used conflict as motivation up until now?
2. How much of TJ's goal of letter jackets is because of his anger at Rich, and how much is it about his teammates?

Chapter 7

1. Why is everyone so surprised by Andy's leg (or lack thereof)? How might that impact the success of the team?
2. TJ's parents have "kept [him] supplied with books about African – American heroes, and...have celebrated certain of their accomplishments and birthdays" (121). How effective is this method in conveying cultural heritage? Do you believe that reading about people of the same race helps you understand your cultural identity? Why or why not?
3. TJ talks about Mott's use of the team as a sanctuary. How can you tell it is where he finds peace? What is your sanctuary from the stress of life?
4. On page 126 TJ talks about how his "evasive action doesn't have the same effect of James Garner's Camaro in the old Rockford Files TV show." The Rockford Files was a 1970's – 1980's era TV show. This is not the first 80's reference TJ makes in the novel. How do these allusions to a much earlier time help us understand TJ?
5. Do you think these allusions are helpful to you in understanding the story, or do they confuse you because they are to things before your time? Explain the impact of these allusions on the story.
6. Mr. Davis is a very different kind of teacher than Mr. Simet. Compare and contrast these two teachers.
7. Create a general statement about the role of teachers in TJ's life to this point. Then, explain how a teacher has impacted you in a positive way in your life.

Chapter 8

1. Do you think TJ's idea for lettering requirements is too idealistic? Why or why not?
2. When Jackie says that he "wants people to still be in the water when [he] finishes," Icko responds by implying it is an impossible goal. Is this response a form of bullying? If yes, how is it similar to what the swimmers have encountered from others? If no, how is it different than the bullying they have encountered?

3. On page 140, the first meet ends and the narration moves right to their pizza dinner. Why do you think Crutcher doesn't reveal the outcome of the meet?
4. TJ is accused of trying to be a "savior" for others in order to bolster himself. Do you agree with this accusation? Why or why not?
5. You can tell the swimmers trust each other. What three moments leading up to this chapter have been the most essential in developing this sense of trust?

Chapter 9

1. Look carefully at the newspaper article printed about the meet. Identify all of the words with a **positive connotation** and explain how each works to make the swim team seem great.
2. Rewrite the newspaper article, replacing the positive words with negative words – essentially, spin the article the other way. How would this have changed the swimmers' attitudes?
3. The newspaper article makes you think about how facts can be "spun" to achieve a certain purpose. Do you think TJ has "spun" any part of this story to make himself look good? Choose a section of this chapter and explain how TJ presents himself.
4. Do you hold Mr. Jones responsible for what happened to the baby? Is Mr. Jones being too hard on himself?
5. Academics are mentioned for the first time in this chapter. Do you think that by focusing on athletics, Crutcher is ignoring an important element of success: academics?
6. How might having Heidi in the house be helpful for both Heidi and TJ?
7. What do you think is the major impetus for Rich's actions at the house? Why do you think he acts this way?

Chapter 10

1. Explain why Mr. Jones likes to listen to whale songs. What emotional impact do these songs have?
2. What parts of TJ's speech could be considered "whale talk" and what cannot?
3. How does Mr. Jones's parental history help us understand how he interacts with TJ?
4. According to Mr. Jones, all whale talk is important. TJ wonders about the voices of Chris and Andy in the same ocean as Rich and Mike. Do all voices have the same value? Why or why not?
5. Mott has an internet girlfriend, but sends pictures of Tay-Roy. How does this example demonstrate insecurity with Mott's own identity?

Chapter 11

1. How are Alicia and Kristin similar, and how are they different?
2. Mrs. Jones says that "when Rage takes you over, you do what the rage tells you" (199). Provide textual examples to support Mrs. Jones's statement, using at least three different characters.

3. What has been the role of family in creating TJ's identity?
4. Compare and contrast the mentor relationships between Mr. Simet & TJ and Mike Barbour & Rich Marshall.

Chapter 12

1. TJ says that the four weekends Rich spent in jail did not rehabilitate him. Do you believe that jail time has the potential to rehabilitate people?
2. What has the letter jacket come to symbolize for RJ? For others?
3. How does Alicia explain why she stays with Rich? Do you understand what she means?
4. Mott's story is profoundly sad. How does he demonstrate positive ways to move on from personal tragedy?

Chapter 13

1. What techniques does Simet use to try and justify the lettering requirements?
2. How does the odd range of music at practice reflect the swim team itself?
3. TJ doesn't seem to have the school's support, and yet doesn't feel alone. Why not?
4. Why would TJ threaten to throw the race? Do you understand or agree with that option?
5. Jackie has found a place to "be" with this swim team. How do you think they can continue this support system when the season is over?
6. The chapter ends without knowing how the season ends. How do you feel about this omission of plot?

Chapter 14

1. Can you predict how the season ended based on the reactions of TJ's teammates?
2. TJ's solution to saving the "group" is to get involved with basketball. Think about the question about sports and academics back in Chapter 9. Do you think Crutcher is focusing too much on sports as an option for team building? How else might the team stay together, if not in the athletic realm?
3. TJ threw the race! How do you feel about this decision?
4. The decision is made to match Chris up against Mike in the water. Do you think this was a smart decision for TJ to make without discussing it with Chris?
5. Do you believe that TJ's feelings about Mike and Rich are influencing his decision to boil everything down to this one swim?
6. We see some selfish decisions in this chapter. Identify three of them (using at least two characters) and explain why the people put themselves first.
7. The story line about Alicia and Rich takes over in this chapter. Why do you think we have this secondary plot line in the story? How does it enhance TJ's story?

8. At the end of the chapter Mr. Jones ends up giving Rich another second chance (the first coming when Rich came up to the door at the house). Why do you think Mr. Jones is giving him another second chance? Do you agree with this decision?

Chapter 15

1. It's the big deal. How does Chris feel about the swim and what ends up working as encouragement?
2. How does Mike's reaction to the swim demonstrate his personality?
3. TJ says he lives up to his name on page 278. Do you agree? How / why?
4. Explain why Mrs. Jones doesn't come to the basketball game.
5. Many people have grown in confidence since we first met them. Explain how characters have grown since the beginning of the novel.
6. TJ says "it's a mistake." How might this be foreshadowing? Explain what you think might happen.
7. Mr. Jones's last line reminds TJ of Jesus's last lines. How might Mr. Jones be like Jesus?
8. How do you feel about the death of Mr. Jones? What lesson should be learned from this event?

Chapter 16

1. Compare Kyle to Mr. Jones. How are they similar?
2. How do these similarities help justify the theory that who we are is based on our genes?
3. How is TJ dealing with the death of his father?
4. How does the absence of TJ's father in his life compare to the absence of his biological mother?
5. Do you think you'd be able to follow Mr. Jones's advice for "not one minute for revenge" (296)? Why would that be hard to do?
6. Many people end up living with the Jones family at the end of the novel. If the house represents acceptance and growth, how does the location of the people on the property (on the edge, in the house, etc) reflect the amount of personal growth they have endured?
7. What is TJ talking about when he says "Sometimes there's just no place to put this" (298). What is "this" and why does he want to put it somewhere?
8. How does this relate to Mr. Jones's idea of whale talk?

Post Reading

1. Why is Whale Talk an appropriate title for this story? Chart the idea of whale talk through the beginning, middle, and end of the novel.
2. Return to the first page of the novel. TJ explains how the "best way to write a story, be it fact or fiction, is to believe aliens will find it someday and make a movie...the trick is to dig out

the people and events that connect, and connect them” and to just provide the facts. How well did TJ (and by that token, Crutcher) achieve that in Whale Talk? What moments are the best examples of this goal, and which moments might fall short of this goal?

3. What impacts TJ’s identity development more: his family, his ethnicity, or his hometown culture? Explain.
4. Do you think TJ would have been as successful and driven if he was not “different” than others?
5. How does this novel help us understand “outsiders” and how they are treated by the mainstream?
6. Bullying plays a big part in how events unfold in the novel. What is the worst moment of peer bullying in the story? Why?
7. How does TJ attempt to combat bullying?
8. What are ways that we can all work to prevent and address bullying in schools?
9. What are some moments of relationship bullying in the novel?
10. What are ways that people can work to address unhealthy relationships? What resources would have been good outlets / aides for Alisha and Kristin?
11. What impacted Mr. Jones’s identity development the most: his family, his ethnicity, or something else?
12. Heidi is an interesting character. What has impacted Heidi’s identity development more: her family, her ethnicity, or her location? Explain.

Activities

Before Reading

- **Take a Side**—I like to do a survey before and after reading to see how students’ minds change after they become engaged in a book. Create a list of statements that a student must agree with, remain neutral or disagree with, and then have students complete it before reading the book. To get students up and moving I like to have the three sides assigned to different locations in the classroom; after the students finish taking the survey I read the questions aloud, and the students move to the location that matches their answers.
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- **Identity 8 Corners**— Identity and the teen experience were major themes when I used the book. To get students thinking about their identity I did a modified 4 Corners activity. Students were given the following statements:

- The part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis is_____ The part of my identity that I am the least aware of on a daily basis is_____ The part of my identity that was most emphasized in my family growing up was _____ The part of my identity that I would like to explore further is _____

The part of my identity that that serves as my primary compass for my work style is _____ The part of my identity that garners me the most privilege is _____ The part of my identity that I believe is the most misunderstood by others is_____ The part of my identity that I feel is difficult to discuss with others who identify differently ____ .

Students filled this survey out quietly and were asked to choose between the following 8 choices to fill in the blanks: race, gender, socio-economic class, age, religion, ability/disability status, education, family status. Students had to have reasons for their choices and then physically move to the spot in the room designated for their answer choice (usually with a big sign on the wall). In the groups they discuss why they moved where they moved and then share out with the class one group at a time.

- **Banned Book Discussion**–Nothing peaks interest like the forbidden. Just mentioning that many of Chris Crutcher’s books have been banned will quickly engage students. A great way to get students excited about reading this book is to act like it is a little edgy (which it is, when some themes are considered). Plan a group discussion on banned books, talk about different famous book on the banned list and the fears that people held when they were first printed. See if the fears have changed or carried over to the books on the banned list today. Talk about the motives behind writing books that have more serious themes and the message that authors want to get across to their readers. Ask them to take a side and to play devil’s advocate. When is it okay to cross a line, and when is it better to refrain? Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas once wrote, “Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.” Start with that and see where the discussion goes.
- **Non Fiction Pieces (See Appendix for Articles/Questions)**
 - a. **"Black Like I Thought I Was"**. In this non-fiction article, Kaplan explores what it would feel like to wake up one morning and discover you were a different race. Questions such as race's influence on identity and personal identity development are raised in this article, as students consider the role of race in identity development prior to reading about TJ and his mixed ethnicity background.

b. Opposing Viewpoints: Bullying. Students are presented with two contradictory perspectives on the extent of bullying in schools with these two non-fiction pieces. They then explore the authorial impact of each piece and how the characters from our text would react to the authorial claims.

- **Mock Trial**—Just in case the banned book discussion goes really well. You could hold a mock trial by dividing the students into three groups: school board members (see the book as vulgar and inappropriate), students (feel their first amendment rights are being infringed) and justices (must decide). Everyone gets a chance to make his case and then the verdict is presented.
- **Technology Based Extension** Using the tumblr page provided, students explore the concept of "identity" – how it is formed, how much culture / race / family influences development of identity, and what identity means to each individual. <http://changingidentity.tumblr.com/>

Task: Explore the many facets of identity on these pages. Click through the photographs, watch the videos, and read the articles provided. Then, when you have finished, select your four favorites and complete the associated tasks. You may handwrite or type your tasks, but any information you either directly quote or paraphrase (put in your own words) must be cited directly after that sentence. Good luck, and enjoy!

While-Reading

- **Question, Comment, Prediction Boards**—Give each student a stack of sticky notes, one for each chapter in the book. Create a series of category titles from major characters, relationships, themes and write them on big pieces of butcher paper or on a spare chalk board. After reading have the students write down one question, comment or prediction that they have about the book so far. I like to do this as an informal assessment to see how the reading is going, but I also use their answers to get conversations going. This works really well with my lower level readers because it keeps the locus of control with them and their own reading. It keeps them engaged, but it takes away the pressure of reading for every little detail. They know they have to write something that shows genuine effort and thought, but they can focus on the content of the story rather than minor details. I occasionally mix this up by having them write down a quiz question that can be answered by what they have just read, and then I compile them and give them a reading check quiz. I also keep mini white boards under their seats that I let them write their QCP in case they lose interest. The first one to write a QCP that I approve gets to call on the rest and lead the discussion.
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- **Theme Wall**—Because this book is so full of rich themes, it was good for my class to have a running list of them up on the wall for referencing during discussion. You can stay basic or get creative. I have done everything from a piece of butcher paper with

markers to a theme tree that gets a new leaf each time a new theme is revealed. You know what your students like, just do something that they can continue to work on throughout the reading. One class designed theirs like a finish line, and they would reorganize it to show which themes were the most relevant to what was going on in the story.

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- **Truisms**–I like to do this activity after each big twist and turn in a story. A truism is basically a saying that applies to what is going on in the story. Students can choose a common saying like “what goes around comes around,” “burn me once, shame on you, burn me twice shame on me,” and “a wise head makes a closed mouth,” or they can create their own. I usually print out a list of truisms for the students to refer to when they get stuck, but the ones they come up with are usually really good. After choosing a truism I usually ask them to write a simple definition/translation, choose a related quote from the book, and write a short paragraph about why they chose it, what it means to them, how it applies to the book or how it relates to real life.
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- **Chapter Titles**–This activity is great as a ticket out the door or quick in-class assessment. Have each student create an original title for the chapter they have just finished. I gave this to them as a one page handout that I collected each class. This activity can also be used for books that have chapter titles; just call it an alternative title. You can even create a class table of contents by voting on the favorite titles and compiling them onto one page.
- **Creative Comparisons**–Chris Crutcher makes some amazing comparisons in his writing that are both witty and poignant. As a way to practice identifying similes and metaphors I kept a tally of points. I assigned one point to a student when they pointed out a simile or metaphor and distinguished which one it was. The students became very competitive, but it led to some great conversation about the way Crutcher writes. They also became more engaged in the story by making connections and empathizing with the characters.
- **Lunch Table Diagram**– Ask students to consider the cliques in school. Then ask them to draw a diagram from an overhead view of the cafeteria. Instead of circular tables each clique must be represented by a shape or picture that represents that particular group (Country Kids– Cowboy boot, Band Kids–a Drum etc.). Have the students share the cliques they feel exist in the school and what impact they have.

- **Journal Entry**–At critical points throughout the book a having students write a journal entry is a great way to get them engaging with the text. Have each student select a character in the book (not Bo) and compose a short journal entry from the character’s point of view. This should be fairly informal, and I would put a one page limit on it.
- **Characterization & Conflict Call-Out Cards**–This book is really great to use while teaching both characterization an conflict. As a way to let students earn extra points, or just for fun give students two popsicle sticks and four index cards. Write the following words, one on each card: internal, external, physical and behavioral. Staple the cards back to back (internal with external) and (physical with behavioral). Stick the popsicle stick between the middle of the cards as a handle. The finished product should look like a little flag. While reading in class students can raise their call out cards when they discover a moment of characterization or conflict. Have them identify what specifically clued them in to the realization. Also have the students elaborate: Was it direct or indirect characterization? Was it personal or relations? Etc. It is a fun way for students who may to speak up without being called upon without warning.

Post-Reading

- **Encomium**–An encomium is basically a praise or complement. Students are sometimes shy to praise each other in class, especially if they have to be super original. A fill-in-the-blank encomium is a great way for them to apply what they learn from reading Ironman to their lives, engaging in the book. Write each student’s name on a note card or popsicle stick and have them draw a name (not their own). Give each student a blank encomium and fifteen minutes to fill it out. You can take them up and read them aloud, but it is really more meaningful if the students read them themselves. **See appendix.**
- **Silent Graffiti**–This is a great activity to do before a final test, or as a way to jumpstart a final discussion. Create a list of characters, adjectives and themes. For each item on the list, cut a piece of butcher paper (about two feet long). In black marker write one item on each piece of butcher paper, and then tape the paper to the walls around the room. Divide students into enough groups to have one at each station. Give each student or group of students a different color marker. Let them rotate through the “walls” spending about one minute at each station. Watch the time and say “switch” at each minute. At each station they are to write a word or statement that they feel identifies or describes the person or theme. The only rules are to be appropriate and silent. After each group has been to every station you will have a great graffiti of original thoughts on the book. Talk through each paper with the

group. It is great to see what they come up with, and it is also fun for them to see what other people wrote. Do not be afraid to call them out if there is something particularly inspiring or out there.

- **Diction in Whale Talk**– See Appendix for writing prompt
- **Facebook Profiles**–This activity combines the digital age student with the age old book character. There are many Facebook profile templates available online that you can print out, or you can let your students create their own. Each student must choose one character from the book and create a Facebook profile about them. I make them include the following: name, picture, gender, approximate age, relationship status, hometown, about me, favorite quotes (at least one from the book), friends list, wall posts, likes and dislikes, status update, bumper sticker, current playlist, etc. My student thought this was the easiest thing ever, but they really showed a lot of insight into the characters when they completed the posters. Read–Write–Think even has an interactive “profile publisher” online available at: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/profile-publisher-30067.html>
- **Wanted Posters**–This activity is particularly great for the artistic bunch of students. On a sheet or half sheet of poster board have your students create a wanted portrait of a favorite character. This works really well with the evil villain protagonist types, but a little creativity can make it work for the good ones too. Underneath the portrait have the students create a list of information based on what they have learned in the book. I typically make them include the following: full name, approximate age, physical description, place of residence, place last seen, crime wanted for, possible accomplices, reward money amount, suggested punishment, etc. My students have even aged the posters to make them look authentic by staining them with tea and burning the edges.
-
- **Found Poetry**–If you happen to teach poetry while you are covering this novel you could kill two birds with one stone using this activity. Create a list using the themes (or characters) from the book. Have each student or groups of students choose one item from the list. The materials needed for this project is old magazines and newspapers, glue, scissors and poster board or butcher paper. Students must create an original poem (based on their theme) using whole words that they find in the magazines and newspapers. I told my students not to write a poem and then try to find the words, but rather to flip through and cut out words that they like and then organize them into a poem. Occasionally students could not find one word they needed and I let them cut out letters to spell it out. You can tailor the poems to set length, free verse/rhymed verse etc. guidelines. The results are incredible, and the

students really draw on their knowledge of the book to provide depth and understanding to their theme. This is also a less intimidating way to get your students writing their own poetry. Once all of the posters are finished you can even have a poetry slam and let the students read their poems aloud. We took a class vote and the winning poster got a blue ribbon. I have never been more blown away and genuinely thrilled with my students as I was when they did this project.

- **Quadrama**—This activity worked really well with my younger students, but it is also really great for visual learners. Think of it as the old shoebox diorama with a makeover. Take four sheets of construction paper and cut them into 8.5x8.5 squares. Fold the squares in half to form a triangle, unfold, and then fold the other way. Once unfolded you should have a clear center mark. Make a cut from one corner to the center mark. Turn the square so that it is like a diamond with the cut piece at the bottom. Tuck one of the cut flaps under the other one and glue it in place. You should have a three sided pyramid. Repeat this process with the other three squares until you have four pyramids. Arrange the pyramids to form a big four sided pyramid that is open on each side. Glue the pieces together and stick them to a fifth square base. The students can then use words, magazine cutouts, drawings, quotes, etc. to depict the world of Bo Brewster.
- **Body Biography**—This is a character analysis activity. Give each student a basic body silhouette for them to fill in with their own observations about the character. You can use a different representation for each location: head/dreams/thoughts, feet/where they are going/where they have been, hands/what they carry with them/what they bring to others, heart/what they love, arms/sources of strength/challenges, etc. Once the writing is completed let your students draw clothes and accessories.
- **Lessons Learned**—Because this book is full of lessons that can be applied to real life, a great wrap up activity is to have your students write about one lesson that they will carry with them from the book to their lives. You could even use their writings as part of a bully prevention/diversity/tolerance exercise. Do not let the powerful messages Crutcher delivers stay between the book covers!
- **Post Secret**—“PostSecret is an ongoing community art project where people mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a homemade postcard.”(From Postsecret.com). This project is by far my favorite to do with students. After showing a slide show of appropriate secrets I have collected over the years, I ask students to

do the same. Students are given a number and I simply check off the number when it is submitted. The secrets are displayed on the bulletin board and the students love looking at what their peers have decided to share.

- **This I Believe**–See assignment in Appendix

Appendix

ENCOMIUM

After reading the kind words shared on the bus rides to and from swim meets, I would like our class to do the same. Today you will draw a name and create an Encomium to that person. Now you are thinking: "What the heck is an Encomium?! Stop usin' those big words!" Well the definition is: **glowing and warmly enthusiastic praise**. And I'm going to help you out with this too!

Encomium to _____

(S)he's a/an _____, Loves _____

and

_____ ; We'll always remember his/her _____,

_____ ,

_____ , _____ .

I wish I had his/her _____

_____ and finally his/her _____ .

Letter Writing Activity

Letter to Chris Crutcher, Whale Talk's Author

For today's assignment you are going to be writing a letter to Chris Crutcher. This assignment has 2 purposes:

#1. Practice (letter) writing skills

#2. Share what you really think about the book so far with the author

Using the laptops please compose a 3 paragraph (at least!) business letter to Mr. Crutcher. In this letter please include the following:

- Do you like the book? Why?
- Why should 9th graders read this book?
- Is this book appropriate for High Schoolers? Why or Why not?
- Do you like books that use sports?
- Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or Why not?

Use examples from the book to support your opinion

Spelling, usage, and mechanics WILL count. Please spell check and watch run-ons and fragments. Remember a paragraph has at least **5 sentences**.

This I Believe

“This I Believe offers a simple, if difficult invitation: Write a few hundred words expressing the core principles that guide your life—your personal credo” –Jay Allison

This assignment invites you to make a very great contribution: nothing less than a statement of your personal beliefs, of the values which rule your thought and action. Your essay should be about three minutes in length when read loud, written in a style as you yourself speak, and total **no more than 500 words**. I know this is a tough job. What I want is something personal-- no one can write it for you. You must write it yourself, in the language most natural to you. I ask you to write in **your own words**.

To guide you through this process, here are some suggestions:

Tell a story: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life.

Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be real. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

Be brief: Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. That’s about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

Name your belief: If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on a core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.

Be positive: Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Write about what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.

Be personal: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

What This I Believe is NOT:

–A time to stand on your soapbox. We do not want a sermon, religious or lay; we do not want editorializing or sectarianism or “finger-pointing.” We do not even want your views on the American way of life, or democracy or free enterprise. These are important but for another occasion. We want to know what you live by. And we want it terms of “I,” not the editorial “We.”

-A time to discuss what you do NOT believe in. Stick to affirmatives. Avoid being negative and criticizing.

“We are sure the statement we ask from you can have wide and lasting influence. Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent. Your belief, simply and sincerely spoken, is sure to stimulate and help those who hear it. We are confident it will enrich them. May we have your contribution?” – Edward R. Murrow in the original invitation sent to essayists in the 1950’s

Writing Prompt

Student Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Diction in Whale Talk

Task 1: Comprehension: Carefully read the newspaper article printed in the school paper in Chapter 9, and answer the following questions.

Cutter Mermen Set Records

In a performance this past weekend that may well rival the winning of the state football championship, the Cutter High School swim team set school records in nine individual events and one relay. Swimmers Dan Hole, Andy Mott, Jackie Craig, Simon DeLong, Tay-Roy Kibble, Chris Coughlin, and The Tao Jones scored points in those nine events in a losing effort. The small size of Cutter's team made winning either of the meets in this double-duel event virtually impossible. Cutter's team includes no divers, and their small numbers exclude them from participating in more than one of the two relays.

Nevertheless, the Herculean efforts of the small but fiercely competitive group of athletes could be the seed that spawns an athletic dynasty in the distant future, the likes of which Cutter High School has never known, according to Captain T. J. Jones.

Coach John Simet was not available for comment.

1. How accurate is the news article? Identify one **absolutely accurate** claim and one **stretch** of the truth claim.
2. What is the impact of quoting TJ in the newspaper article? How does it reflect upon the team and TJ?
3. What is the impact of having no quotation from Coach Simet in the article? How would that quotation have changed the impact of the newspaper article?
4. According to the paper, how much fault should be attributed to the swim team for losing the meet? How might that shape the way the team is perceived?

Task 2: According to TJ, a controversy arose over the "syntax and word choice" of the newspaper article covering the team's first meet. Look carefully at the newspaper article printed about the meet. Highlight all of the words with a **positive connotation** and identify how each works to make the swim team seem great in the margin.

Then, identify the impact of the **positive diction** (as a whole) on how the team is presented by answer the following questions:

What is the newspaper staff attempting to do with this article?

How do they do it (What specific kind of positive diction is used? Flattering diction? Praising diction?)

Why does it matter? How might this impact how the team is perceived by the school as a whole? Consider what the team is up against, in the social realm of the school.

Combine the answers to all three (**what, how, and why**) into one clear, concise sentence that addresses the question:

What is the role of the newspaper article's diction in shaping the school's perception of the Mermen?

Task 3: Fill out the following as specifically as possible.

When describing the swim team itself, the newspaper uses _____ diction, revealing that the paper intends to _____ (role of the paper in the team's future).

What evidence would you use to support this claim? Provide two quotations from the article.

How do these quotations help support that argument? (At least four sentences, please).

When describing the likely outcome of the meet, the newspaper uses _____ diction, representing the team as _____ .

What evidence would you use to support this claim? Provide two quotations from the article.

How do these quotations help support that argument? (At least four sentences, please).

Task 4: Rewrite the newspaper article by replacing all of the words with a **positive** connotation with words that have a **negative** connotation.

Original	Revised (with negative connotations)
<p style="text-align: center;">Cutter Mermen Set Records</p> <p>In a performance this past weekend that may well rival the winning of the state football championship, the Cutter High School swim team set school records in nine individual events and one relay. Swimmers Dan Hole, Andy Mott, Jackie Craig, Simon DeLong, Tay-Roy Kibble, Chris Coughlin, and The Tao Jones scored points in those nine events in a losing effort. The small size of Cutter’s team made winning either of the meets in this double-duel event virtually impossible. Cutter’s team includes no divers, and their small numbers exclude them from participating in more than one of the two relays.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Herculean efforts of the small but fiercely competitive group of athletes could be the seed that spawns an athletic dynasty in the distant future, the likes of which Cutter High School has never known, according to Captain T. J. Jones.</p> <p>Coach John Simet was not available for comment.</p>	

How would this revision change your answers to the following questions?

What is the newspaper staff attempting to do with this article?

How do they do it (What specific kind of negative diction is used? Demeaning diction? Offensive diction?)

Why does it matter? How might this impact how the team is perceived by the school as a whole? Consider what the team is up against, in the social realm of the school.

Task 5: Based on this exercise, what role does diction play in creating an impact on the audience?

Non Fiction Resources

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

“Black Like I Thought I Was” Erin Aubry Kaplan

Understanding the Text

1. Why does Wayne Joseph struggle with the question of whether or not to tell people that he is not Black?
2. What do you think his struggle with this question suggests about him?
3. What does it suggest about race as an aspect of our identity? our culture?
4. How did Joseph’s family come to be identified as Black?
5. Why is this part of their family history important? What might it suggest about how race is defined and treated in American society?
6. What does Kaplan mean when she writes at the end of paragraph 7 that “the South was wrong about its policies but it was right about our color. It had to be.” Do you think she’s right? Explain.

Exploring the Issues

7. Kaplan writes in paragraph 2 that being Black gives someone “an indestructible house to live in and a bed to rest on.” Examine her use of metaphor to make this point. What does this metaphor of a house suggest about racial identity? Do you find the metaphor effective in this case? Explain.

Entering the Conversation

8. Consider Wayne Joseph’s experience. Should he continue to identify himself as a Black man, even after DNA testing shows that he is not? Why or why not?

9. Based on your analysis of this piece, how does race influence identity? Free write on this complicated question. In your **first paragraph**, identify how race influences Joseph’s identity (both before and after his DNA test). In your **second paragraph**, identify how race influences your identity. In your final paragraph (**your third paragraph**), address the role of race in contemporary culture. Use the paper provided.

Article 1: "The Extent of Bullying is Exaggerated"

In the following viewpoint, Benjamin Soskis refutes the claim that bullying is a serious problem facing today's youth. He asserts that studies reporting a high incidence of bullying among youths are flawed because they define bullying too broadly. He warns that aggressive antibullying efforts may vilify normal adolescent behavior and prevent children from learning how to cope with social injuries that are simply a part of growing up. Soskis is a reporter for the *New Republic*, a periodical that examines political and social issues.

As you read, consider the following questions:

What types of adolescent behavior does Soskis consider normal?

In the author's opinion, what are the potential harms of zero-tolerance antibullying programs?

What does Soskis suggest to reduce bullying in schools?

Pity the poor bully. For decades he flourished, thanks to a national consensus that boys would be boys and a little roughhousing couldn't hurt. We indulged the noogie, winked at the charley horse, and thought it sort of funny when the high school tough crammed the band geek into the locker. Poking, taunting, name-calling—at least in modest doses—were considered a normal, if sometimes trying, part of adolescent development. One gave up one's lunch money not only in fear, but with a certain deference to the rules of the game.

"Onerous Culture of Bullying"

No longer. If the bully was once an accepted part of a basically healthy educational environment, he is now the embodiment of a youth culture so cruel that it leads persecuted children to kill. "Think back to third grade, sixth grade, ninth grade," intoned the San Diego Union-Tribune. "Maybe you were too short, too thin, too fat, too tall, too dumb, too smart. Too ... whatever 'they' decided. They who tripped you, mocked you, grabbed your lunch. Stole your dignity, your confidence, your spirit." In March 2001, the Los Angeles Times spoke of bullies as a national pestilence: "If we could only round them up and herd them into detention, then haul their parents in for counseling, maybe we could isolate the menace of bullies in our midst." That same month, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation released a survey showing that bullying has become schoolchildren's primary concern, surpassing drugs and discrimination. Attorney General John Ashcroft has lamented our "onerous culture of bullying." State legislatures in Georgia, New Hampshire, and Vermont have passed laws cracking down on it. And, in May 2001, the much-publicized release by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of a massive study of bullying seemed to confirm our worst fears: Of the more than 15,000 students surveyed in grades six through ten, a full 30 percent said they had been involved in bullying, either as victims or as perpetrators; 17.2 percent said it happened at least once a week.

This sudden national outcry against bullying has its roots in the spate of school shootings in recent years—in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Littleton, Colorado, Santee, California, and so on—several of which were conducted by students tormented by long-term harassment. And the outcry is, in many ways, a promising development—a cousin of our increased awareness of sexual harassment, bigotry, and other offenses. But, like many social movements born of tragedy, the anti-bullying movement has been characterized by widespread overreaction. Schools have outlawed dodgeball because it encourages bullies. They've cracked down on offenses as minor as a menacing look or a nasty gesture—because, as one California school district argued, these affronts "can be precursors to bigger conflicts." Every school is seen as a potential Columbine, every disgruntled student a potential Andy Williams.¹

Distinguishing Tragedies and Petty Cruelties

In reality, there's reason to believe our bullying "crisis" is exaggerated—that, in the wake of Columbine, we're losing the capacity to distinguish between the imponderable tragedy of a school shooting and the petty, everyday cruelties that inevitably accompany adolescence. What's more, in our overwrought efforts to stamp out those mundane cruelties, we may actually end up making them worse.

Any discussion of bullying is complicated by the fact that, because there has been so little research on the subject until recently, it's difficult to know whether it's getting worse. But the perception that schools are becoming increasingly brutal is undermined by the fact that, according to a number of major indexes, youth violence is declining. The Justice Policy Institute reports that youth crime is at its lowest level in a quarter-century; the number of violent deaths occurring in or near school has decreased nearly 70 percent since 1992, from 55 to 16 per year. "To the extent that there is any trend at all, it is certainly not up," says the institute's director, Vincent Schiraldi. William Modzeleski, director of the Safe and Drug-

Free Schools Program at the Department of Education, agrees, noting that schools are among the safest places for our kids to be.

How does this square with the recent studies that find widespread bullying in schools? It's basically a matter of definition—and the anti-bullying movement has broadened that definition beyond physical violence, threats, and taunting to include all potentially hurtful social interactions. The Michigan Education Association, for example, defines bullying to include spreading rumors and social exclusion—so refusing to include a klutz in a recess basketball game is a form of persecution. Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center and a leading proponent of anti-bullying programs, argues that "psychological intimidation can be as damaging as physical assaults." Therefore, he recommends that "hard looks" and "stare downs" be added to the actionable offenses in student codes of conduct. In May 2000, the state of New Hampshire enacted a law defining bullying as "conduct which subjects a pupil to insults, taunts or challenges, whether verbal or physical in nature, which are likely to intimidate or provoke a violent or disorderly response," and required schools to report all such incidents to the superintendent. But, as the chairman of one county school board complained, "What they define as bullying, it basically ends up being almost anything." The situation is particularly complex for girls, who, researchers agree, torment each other through subtler, less physical methods of "relational aggression," such as gossip or threats to withdraw friendship if certain conditions are not met.

Lost in the Furor

Even the vaunted NICHD survey illustrates the problem. Although it tried admirably to differentiate among particular forms of bullying, these distinctions were lost in the furor about the overall statistics. According to Tonja Nansel, the study's lead author, those overall numbers were based on the following definition: "We say a student is being bullied when another student, or group of students, say or do nasty or unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she doesn't like, but it is not bullying when two students of the same strength quarrel or fight." Among the respondents, 10.6 percent said they had been bullied, 13 percent said they'd acted as bullies, and 6.3 percent said they'd been both bullies and bullied. But buried within the study's broad definition of bullying were numbers that mediate any sense of crisis: Just over half of those who'd been bullied—or about 9 percent of the total sample—said the bullying included a physical component, such as "hitting, slapping, or pushing." And of those bullied, only about 15 percent—a total of one student in a class of 40—said he or she was subjected to physical bullying once a week or more.

Defining Bullying Broadly

By defining bullying so broadly, the anti-bullying movement risks pathologizing behaviors that, however unpleasant, are in some sense normal parts of growing up and learning how to interact in the world. And this may not be in the long-term interest of either the bullies or the bullied. For the latter, zero-tolerance anti-bullying programs could leave them unprepared to assimilate the often unpleasant realities of social interaction without conceiving all hostility or peer rejection as traumatic. It's a similar danger to one already confronted by the self-esteem movement, a close relative of the anti-bullying effort. Initially, social scientists believed low self-esteem was often at the root of violent behavior. But, in recent years, a very different analysis has emerged: that unrealistically high self-esteem can lead to violence when challenged by negative feedback. Similarly, with bullying—though it is undoubtedly true that, for too long, parents and teachers failed to recognize the psychic trauma a child could experience from peer rejection—we can overcompensate if we do not train children to deal with the social slights that accompany adult life. In both cases, the danger is that, by trying to insulate children from harsh realities, we leave them more vulnerable and potentially more hostile when those realities inevitably intrude.

Anti-bullying researchers answer this challenge by arguing that, in fact, adults are never asked to tolerate the types of abuse we condone on the playground. According to Debra Pepler, a child psychologist at York University in Toronto, "[A]lthough there may be people in my work environment who I wouldn't want to take home for dinner on Friday night, I don't tell them they can't sit beside me in a staff room, I don't say they can't be on a committee or they can't come to a meeting with me. Because as adults, we come to recognize and live with differences and we learn to live with relationships that don't need to be close friendships." But as adults, we do not stop excluding others or gossiping about them; we simply grow more adept at cloaking and interpreting the signals we send. There are plenty of ways one adult can humiliate and ridicule another in the workplace without calling him "Fatso." School is an opportunity to teach what forms of behavior should never be tolerated and what forms inevitably must be. So, as with a baby who, in the moment after a fall, looks to his mother for a cue for his response, it is important to know when to rush up and coddle a child and when to laugh as if it were nothing.

But aggressive anti-bullying efforts may pose an even greater risk for the bullies themselves, who are increasingly vilified. This is the ironic reversal at the movement's core: Though launched onto the national stage by acts of extreme school violence, it considers the perpetrators of that violence not as bullies but as the victims of bullies. The actions of the school

shooters are explained through references to their upbringing, environment, and status as victims. The anti-bullying movement rarely labels them obnoxious or evil— even when they espouse racist or anti-Semitic views, seem to court peer antagonism, or relish the attention their violent outbursts bestow upon them. The bullies who theoretically drove them to violence, however, get no such free ride: They're simply unfeeling jerks, popular kids wanting to demonstrate their social dominance of the shy or awkward.

This is an unfortunate bias considering what we know about the psychology of bullies, specifically that they're often not so far removed from those they torment. According to recent studies, the line between the bullies and the bullied is often blurred, and the most troubled children fall into both categories. According to Pepler, those children "have significant problems with anxiety and depression and what are called internalizing disorders, as well as with problems with aggression and delinquency." In a 1999 study of Finnish students, depression was just as common among the bullies as among the bullied, and the former were even more likely to contemplate suicide. Bullies have high rates of truancy and are likely to come from troubled families. According to a pioneer of bullying research, Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus, though bullies are usually well-liked by their peers when they're young, when they enter high school, where physical aggression is less tolerated, they are often shunned and forced to socialize with other aggressive children.

Given this profile, it is deeply counterproductive to treat bullies the way some in the anti-bullying movement propose— by stigmatizing them as fundamentally alien from their innocent classmates. There are already accounts of anti-bullying programs ostracizing the more belligerent and unruly students in class, creating exactly the sort of exclusionary social dynamic the programs claim to combat—but this time, in an inversion that would make [philosopher Friedrich] Nietzsche cringe, with the meek on top. A parent of a second-grader in Casper, Wyoming, complained that her son became severely depressed when he was not voted into his class's Caring Community, a bully-proofing program in which students elect their peers based on whom they consider respectful and responsible. His mother called the program a "popularity contest" and told a local newspaper, "I've seen kids leaving the school crying because they didn't get into the Caring Community. You should see the devastation in their eyes."

The Student Body as a Whole

You would hope anti-bullying activists would try to help these students rather than demonize them. And some do. The best anti-bullying programs—the ones that have been shown, in the limited research to date, to genuinely reduce school violence—do not isolate particular children. Rather, they speak to the student body as a whole, encouraging peers and bystanders to intervene when they think it is appropriate and making sure students have particular adults they can talk to when they feel especially troubled. These programs have learned much from the lessons of Columbine and Santee— about heeding warning signs from the bullies and bullied alike without overreacting to everyday slights; about the importance of parents, teachers, and administrators not lumping children into simplistic binary categories; and, perhaps most crucially of all, about how to teach children to differentiate between the kind of social injury they must learn to endure and the kind that we, as a society, must ensure they never have to.

Citation: Soskis, Benjamin. "The Extent of Bullying Is Exaggerated." *America's Youth*. Ed. Jamuna Carroll. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2008. Opposing Viewpoints. Rpt. from "Bully Pulpit—How America Learned to Hate Bullies." *The New Republic* (14 May 2001). *Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context*. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

Article 2: “Bullying Among Youths is a Serious Problem”

Sue Smith-Heavenrich is a contributor to *Home Education Magazine*, a periodical that focuses on homeschooling. In the following viewpoint, Smith-Heavenrich claims that bullying is a long-ignored problem in America's schools. She contends that physical and verbal abuse can devastate some victims, many of whom resort to violence and suicide. Smith-Heavenrich concludes that schools need to do a better job of identifying bullies and intervening when bullying occurs.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. How does the author support her view that American society openly tolerates violence?
2. In Smith-Heavenrich's view, what problems do many bullies face later in life?
3. What does the author suggest to help stop bullying in schools?

Bullying, often dismissed as a normal part of growing up, is a real problem in our nation's schools, according to the National School Safety Center. One out of every four schoolchildren endures taunting, teasing, pushing, and shoving daily from schoolyard bullies. More than 43 percent of middle- and high-school students avoid using school bathrooms for fear of being harassed or assaulted. Old-fashioned schoolyard hazing has escalated to instances of extortion, emotional terrorism, and kids toting guns to school.

A Culture of Competition and Dominance

Bullying exists in every Western or Westernized culture, from Finland and Australia to Japan and China. Three million bullying incidents are reported each year in the US alone, and over 160,000 children miss school each day for fear of being bullied. In Japan, bullying is called ijime. In 1993, just months before three suicides pushed ijime into the headlines, there were over 21,500 reported incidents of schoolyard bullying.

Many who flee urban streets to escape the culture of violence learn too late that bullying is more common in rural areas than in the cities. Researchers who surveyed hundreds of children living in the rural American Midwest found that 90 percent of middle school students and 66 percent of high school students reported having been bullied during their school careers.

Living in a culture that encourages competition and dominance, most Americans do not take bullying seriously. The problem, says University of California, Los Angeles Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychology Jaana Juvonen, is that ridicule and intimidation have become acceptable. Her studies indicate that starting in middle school, bullies are considered "cool," while their victims are rejected from the social milieu.

It is estimated that more than 90 percent of all incidents of school violence begin with verbal conflicts, which escalate to profanities and then to fists or worse. Our culture has a great degree of tolerance for violence as a solution to problems. Just stroll through the local toy store; you'll find star destroyers, robots that shred their enemies, and even dolls dressed in black trench coats, wearing ski masks and toting guns. It should come as no surprise, then, that the US ranks along with England, Ireland, and Canada as having more bullies per capita than just about anywhere else in the world.

Meet the Bullies

A bully is someone who verbally or physically picks on others. A school bully might push you out of your seat, kick you when your back is turned, demand lunch money, threaten or insult you, call you names, or make jokes about you. A bully might give you dirty looks and spread rumors about you.

In addition to physical violence, threats, and name-calling are behaviors that qualify as emotional bullying. Excluding a child from a group or tormenting, ridiculing, and humiliating someone are kinds of emotional violence. Bullying can be racist in nature, with slurs, taunts, graffiti, and gestures. It can be sexual, with one child making abusive comments or pushing unwanted physical contact on another.

Bullies try to shame and intimidate their victims and make them feel inadequate. Some bullies are active and aggressive; others are reserved and manipulative, relying on smooth talk and lies. Bullying is not gender specific; it is estimated that

25 percent of bullies are females. Regardless of how big they are or what they look like, all bullies want power and have difficulty seeing things from another person's perspective. Simply put, bullies use other people to get what they want. Researchers are now finding out that bullies are different from other children. Their aggression begins at an early age, and they tend to attribute hostile intentions to others. They perceive provocation where none exists and set out to exact revenge. Eventually they come to believe that aggression is their best solution to conflicts.

Formerly it was accepted that bullying was rooted in low self-esteem. Recent research by UCLA's Juvonen and others reveals, however, that bullies tend to regard themselves in a positive light. Up to about sixth grade they are fairly popular, but as they get older their popularity wanes. By the time they're in high school, they tend to hang out with others like themselves: self-styled tough guys who may get what they want but are not well liked.

The person most hurt by bullying is often not the victim but the bully. The bully's behavior interferes with learning and friendships, and later on with work, relationships, income, and mental health. Children who bully tend to turn into antisocial adults and are more likely to commit crimes, batter spouses, and abuse their children. One study shows that 60 percent of boys who were bullies in middle school had at least one court conviction by the age of 24.

One researcher followed the lives of 518 individuals from the age of eight to about 50. Those children who were labeled as bullies went on to receive more driving citations and court convictions and showed higher rates of alcoholism and antisocial personality disorders. Though their intelligence level in the early grades was on a par with that of other children, by the time they were 19, their aggressive behavior interfered with developing intellectual skills. In high school, these were the children who experimented more with sex, drugs, and alcohol and had higher dropout rates.

About one third of bullies are themselves victims of bullying, and a recent study shows that these children have a higher risk of depression and suicidal thoughts than other children. Clearly, being a bully can be hazardous to your health.

The Victims

It is not so much the nature of the harassment, whether verbal or physical, but the extent of the bullying that harms a child. Children who are chronically targeted are likely to become increasingly withdrawn from their peers and suffer increased risk of depression and suicidal thoughts. Some actually end up killing themselves.

Nathan Feris, a seventh-grade student at Dekalb (Missouri) High School, put up with four years of teasing and taunting. He was called "chubby" and "the walking dictionary." One day in March 1987, he brought a gun to school, fatally shot another student, then took his own life. Six years later Curtis Taylor, an eighth-grade honors student from Burlington, Iowa, ended his life. He had been bullied for three years, enduring name-calling, constant tripping and shoving, and vandalism to his bicycle. In 1994, 15-year-old Brian Head walked into his classroom in Woodstock, Georgia, and shot himself. Quiet and overweight, he had been teased and bullied until he could not put up with it anymore.

When Your Child Is the Victim

The best way to protect your children is to foster their confidence and independence. You must also be willing to take action when needed. First and foremost, listen to your children. Ask them about school, social events, playtime, and sports practice. Children who are victimized by bullies may feel ashamed and too embarrassed to tell anyone, so listen to the petty gripes they bring up.

Some children don't reveal much through conversation, but other signs might alert you to the fact that all is not well. They might be afraid of walking home from school or beg for a ride instead of taking the bus. They might become withdrawn, distressed, or anxious, or come home with clothes torn and books destroyed. They may ask for extra lunch money because they are paying someone off; they may cry themselves to sleep at night.

If you think your child is being picked on, take the time to gently draw his fears out in conversation. If he mentions bullying, take his complaints seriously. First, convince him that it is not his fault, that the bully's behavior is the source of the problem. Then give him the tools to deal with the bully. Telling a child either to ignore a bully or to fight back is not the solution. Rather, we need to help our children learn to be assertive—to stand up for themselves in a nonviolent manner and have the confidence to seek help when they need it. We need to encourage action and discourage violence.

If your child is the quiet sort of victim, encourage him to express his feelings. Help him learn skills to manage his anxiety. Teach him some basic social skills: what to say and how to say it. If your child is the sort who eggs on bullies and picks unnecessary battles, teach her to "stop and think." Help her to learn more appropriate ways of expressing anger and encourage her participation in cooperative group activities.

Working together, develop some protective strategies your child can use, a sort of "bully-proof armor." In addition, teach your child to stay away from kids with bullying behavior. You may even want to enroll him or her in a martial arts school.

If your child is being bullied, it is appropriate to call the school or organization where it is happening. You should keep a record of incidents, noting dates and details. And, though you may be tempted to call the bully's parents, do not do so. Instead, try to meet the parents in a neutral environment, perhaps a classroom with a teacher or counselor present, so you can focus on solving the problem instead of blaming each other.

Patience is essential, because bullying problems are not resolved overnight. Even as we help our children develop bully-busting strategies, we must also help them strengthen talents and skills that improve their self-esteem, such as music, sports, art, math—whatever your child has a passion for and is good at. We may need to help our children develop new friendships as well as strengthen the friendships they already have. Remember, children with friends are less likely to be targets of bullies.

When Your Child Is the Bully

The last thing you want to hear is that your child is a bully. Although your normal response is to be defensive, stop for a moment, take a few deep breaths, and defuse the situation. Say something like this: "Instead of labeling my child, please tell me what happened." Then make yourself listen. Remind yourself that this discussion is ultimately about your child's wellbeing, even though it may not seem so at the moment. If your child is a bully, look for what is going on in her life to make her act this way. In talking with your child, do not blame her, and don't get pulled into a discussion about what happened or why. Instead, let her know that bullying is not acceptable in your family or in society. Offer your assistance. Ask her, "How can I help you with this? Who can you go see in school if you find yourself getting into this situation again?" Once you understand her feelings, you can teach her new ways of behaving. You can say, "If you are feeling frustrated, angry, or aggressive, here are some things you can do." Together, you can make a list and tape it to her wall. A particularly helpful activity may be to ask your child to "walk a mile" in the victim's shoes. Because bullies have trouble empathizing with their victims, it is important to discuss how it feels to be bullied.

How do you discourage a child from acting like a bully in the first place? It begins at home. Children who are treated with respect by their parents are less likely to become bullies. Never bully your children, either physically or verbally. Parents who frequently criticize their children, demand unquestioning obedience, or use spanking as punishment are sending the message that anger and intimidation are useful ways of getting what you want. Ridiculing kids, yelling at them, or ignoring them when they misbehave aren't helpful models of behavior either. Instead, use nonphysical discipline measures that are enforced consistently.

Parents who are overly permissive, who give in to obnoxious or demanding children, are letting them know that bullying pays off. Instead, teach the art of negotiation early on and help your children learn how to mediate their own disputes.

School Intervention

According to students, schools respond inadequately, if at all, to reported incidents of bullying. When Frank Barone, principal of Amsterdam High School in Amsterdam, New York, asked hundreds of eighth graders if they had ever been bullied, more than half (58.8 percent) responded in the affirmative. Yet when he asked their teachers how many students had been bullied, they put the figure at 16 percent. Clearly, adults don't recognize the extent of bullying that children face every day.

One researcher taped 52 hours of playground activity at a midsize Toronto school. She documented over 400 episodes of bullying—an average of one every seven minutes—yet teachers intervened in only one out of every 25 episodes. Another survey showed that 71 percent of teachers stayed out of or ignored incidents of teasing and bullying.

The attitudes and behaviors of teachers and school staff strongly determine the extent to which bullying manifests itself in school and on the playground. Where bullying is tolerated, it flourishes. Teachers have a tremendous amount of power to stop bullying behavior in their own classrooms by leading discussions in class. Together, students and their teacher can define bullying as unacceptable behavior, establish rules against it, and develop action plans so that students know what to do when they observe a bullying incident.

Teachers and other adults need to take immediate action when bullying does occur. They can confront bullies in private and notify the parents of both victims and bullies. Most of all, teachers can demand and model behavior grounded in respect and dignity. I've seen this work in classrooms where the teachers and students do not tolerate rude and aggressive behavior. The students feel safe, and they're excited about learning.

While individual teachers can teach tolerance, a better solution is to involve everyone in a schoolwide intervention program. Changing the school culture is more effective than focusing on individuals who misbehave. The best programs include both prevention and intervention. Where such programs have been implemented, the results are dramatic: bullying has decreased by up to 50 percent. Other benefits include reductions in truancy, vandalism, and fighting; improved classroom discipline; a more positive attitude toward schoolwork; and an increased satisfaction with school life among students.

McCormick Middle School, in South Carolina, adopted a program that set clear sanctions for bullies and provided counseling for both bullies and their victims. A year later, the number of students being bullied had dropped from 50 to 22 percent. Within the last three years, schools across the nation (indeed, worldwide) have been developing and implementing "bully-proofing" programs, some with snappy titles, such as "Expect Respect" or "Respect and Protect." These programs typically incorporate development of rules, discussions, role-playing, and other consciousness-raising activities into their daily routine. Some, like the one at Willow Creek Elementary School in Englewood, Colorado, depend upon the active efforts of the 80 percent of the children who are neither bullies nor victims to put a stop to the bullying.

Whatever the program, the key to success is having parents, educators, and community members work together to create a climate that clearly communicates a moral code in which cruelty is neither tolerated nor ignored.

Citation: Smith-Heavenrich, Sue. "Bullying Among Youths Is a Serious Problem." *America's Youth*. Ed. Jamuna Carroll. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2008. *Opposing Viewpoints*. Rpt. from "Kids Hurting Kids: Bullies in the Schoolyard." *Mothering* (2001). *Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context*. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Whale Talk: Non Fiction Extension Readings

Opposing Viewpoints: Bullying

Task: The two articles you have been given both appeared in America's Youth in 2003. Read the two articles provided, annotating each for the three questions posed at the start of each article. When you have finished, answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is your immediate reaction to Article 1?
2. What is your immediate reaction to Article 2?
3. What are the primary differences between the two articles?
4. On what topics do the authors agree?
5. Which article is more convincing? Why? Be specific.
6. How would TJ, Chris, or any other member of the Mermen respond to Article 1?
7. How would TJ, Chris, or any other member of the Mermen respond to Article 2?
8. What do you think about the extent of bullying in schools?