

Teachers' Guide

The Revealers

by Doug Wilhelm



Introduction

Russell Trainor, Elliot Gekewicz, and Catalina Aarons all find each other, as teens that are bully targets often do. Russell is Richie Tucker's favorite target, for no other reason than that he's available and Richie now considers Russell as his property. Catalina has recently moved to the United States from the Philippines. Her mother, a Filipina, married her father, an American businessman on assignment in the Philippines. Bethany DeMere rules the seventh-grade girls, and if she doesn't like Catalina, nobody likes Catalina. And Elliot Gekewicz is the "one

kid . . . it's okay for anybody, absolutely anybody, to trash." (p. 17)

In an attempt to explain her history to other students, Catalina writes an open letter about how she came to be at Parkland Middle School and posts it on the school's KidNet, a self-contained network for the students. Inspired by Catalina's courage, Elliot writes up and posts his last experience with his harassers, who dangled him by his feet over the side of a bridge and then let go. Soon other kids start sending their stories in to this trio, who post them on KidNet under the heading of "The Revealer." One teacher likens it to an underground newspaper.

As more students send in personal stories for everyone to read, the school climate starts to change and the bullies start to feel threatened. There are even some stories from students who confess to being bullies and wish they could take back such behavior. One letter accuses Bethany of forcing the writer to do her social studies project. Bethany's father, an attorney, shows up and accuses the "Revealer" staff of slander. The principal, Mrs. Capelli, who is frightened by technology and public opinion, has been looking for a way to close down KidNet. With this posting in "The Revealer," she has her excuse. KidNet is shut down. Russell, Elliot, and Catalina try one more thing. They enter the Creative Science Fair with a computer program, "Welcome to The Bully Lab." They have researched the problem of bullying at Parkland Middle School. The main menu offers: "I. Hypothesis. II. Research Methods. III. Research Report. IV. Video Reenactments. V. Video Interviews. VI. Gallery of Nasty Notes. VII. The Stories." (p. 183) Several students have helped create the reenactments and interviews. The whole student body fills out research questionnaires. Everyone loves the project, including the judges, who so thoroughly praise Principal Capelli that she agrees to reopen KidNet.

At the end of the book, Catalina has made some friends in spite of Bethany's power. Elliot has learned to stand up for himself and feels a lot less like a dork. Russell and his bully, Richie, have come to a friendly understanding and acceptance of each other. They have even worked together to fight some other personal demons.

Russell, Elliot, and Catalina, definitely dynamic characters, have turned their lives around through their support of one another.

Classroom Connections

This book easily bridges several disciplines for grades 5–8. For example, social studies connections exist through historical events as well as through social behaviors: the students in *The Revealers* are reading *The Diary of Anne*

Frank in Ms. Hogeboom's English class, and Ms. Hogeboom brings up the term "underground newspaper" in reference to their KidNet newspaper, "The Revealer." And then there is the social hierarchy that exists among the students.

Elliot and Catalina have a strong interest in dinosaurs and their social behavior. This, combined with their need to solve problems through the scientific method of investigation, bridges into science.

The Internet is practically another character in *The Revealers* and provides a wealth of opportunities for connections to technology. Everything is so interrelated it is hard to avoid the crossovers.

Standards:

This guide includes discussion questions and activities that meet the following national curriculum standards:

Language Arts:

Students

- apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts
- employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes
- conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources
- use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, and video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge
- use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)

Social Studies:

Students

- relate personal changes to social, cultural, and historical contexts; describe personal connections to place — as associated with community, nation, and world

- describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity
- relate such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, learning, motivation, personality, perception, and behavior to individual development
- identify and describe the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity
- identify and interpret examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism
- work independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals

Science:

Students develop abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry:

- identify questions that can be answered through scientific investigations
- design and conduct a scientific investigation
- use appropriate tools and techniques to gather, analyze, and interpret data
- develop descriptions, explanations, predictions, and models using evidence and explanations
- recognize and analyze alternative explanations and predictions
- communicate scientific procedures and explanations

Students gain understanding about scientific inquiry:

- current scientific knowledge and understanding guide scientific investigations
- technology used to gather data enhances accuracy and allows scientists to analyze and quantify results of investigations
- scientific explanations emphasize evidence, have logically consistent arguments, and use scientific principles, models, and theories
- science advances through legitimate skepticism
- scientific investigations sometimes result in new ideas and phenomena

Technology Foundation:

Students

- demonstrate knowledge of current changes in information technologies and the effect those changes have on the workplace and society
- exhibit legal and ethical behaviors when using information and technology, and discuss consequences of misuse

- apply productivity/multimedia tools and peripherals to support personal productivity, group collaboration, and learning throughout the curriculum
- design, develop, publish, and present products (e.g., Web pages, videotapes) using technology resources that demonstrate and communicate curriculum concepts to audiences inside and outside the classroom
- collaborate with peers, experts, and others using telecommunications and collaborative tools to investigate curriculum-related problems, issues, and information
- select and use appropriate tools and technology resources to accomplish a variety of tasks and solve problems
- research and evaluate the accuracy, relevance, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and bias of electronic information sources concerning real-world problems

Pre-Reading Activities

Before starting the book, have a class discussion about bullying. Create a graphic organizer (map) on the board listing as many bullying behaviors as possible, categorized into verbal, written, and physical behaviors. Discuss how many of these behaviors started in elementary school. How is bullying different in middle school than it is in elementary school? What is the difference between bullying and just having fun or kidding around? Who decides if it is really harassment?

Hand out a floor plan of the school. Ask students to mark the places where bullying occurs. Discuss why such behavior might happen in these areas.

Discussion

Russell is the first character to be bullied. Richie is his tormentor. Ask students the following: how do these two fit the stereotypical images of target and bully? As the students continue reading, how do these images change? How is Elliot bullied? How is Catalina bullied? Are the methods the same? Is there only one type of target? Is there only one type of bully?

The three characters who are victimized, Russell, Elliot, and Catalina, are very different from each other. Have students list the strengths and weaknesses of each, then have them examine the lists to see if there is any explanation for why these three are targets for bullies. Is there any justification for the bullying?

Richie Tucker, Burke Brown, Jon Blanchette, and Bethany DeMere are bullies. Have students list their strengths and weaknesses and then look at the lists to see if there is any explanation for why these four are cruel to others. Is there any justification for their bullying?

There is a behavior role identified in the research about bullying called the "elitist bully" (the bully who has acquired social status and uses it to torment those he/she feels are inferior). How would students define an "elitist bully"? Who in the book fits that definition? The elitist bully is the hardest for the staff to identify. Why might that be?

Big Chris Kuppel starts out as a supporter of Burke and Jon, then he changes. Why? How does he treat Elliot by the end of the book?

Name-calling is often the first bullying behavior learned. As a class, make a list of all the names that are used in the book to hurt someone. Add some names heard at school.

Richie is a very interesting character in the book. He seems to take pride in being a bully, but Russell sees something vulnerable in him. Do students agree or disagree with Russell? What might be Richie's motivation? Why do they think he does the interview for The Bully Lab?

There are many bully Web sites on the Internet. The largest one is from Canada, www.bullying.org. Encourage students to research that Web site and a few others to see how big the problem of bullying is in the world.

As a class, determine the status of bullying in your school. Is there a bully prevention program? Is there a way to report bullying that everyone is aware of? In your school, do you think everyone is treated equally? In the cafeteria, does everyone have a place to sit?

Create a survey similar to the one in the book (p. 185) and ask students to complete it and compile the results. As a class, discuss what you should do with this information. What actions could your class take?

Reaching across the Curriculum

Language Arts

Ask students to explain how Elliot and Catalina use the scientific method of investigation to find out why they are the targets of bullies. The students should start by defining the steps in this method of investigation.

In our society, we are quick to label people. With students, discuss how some labels are positive but some are negative, and make a list of all the labels heard in your school. When does labeling become bullying? Ask students to write about a time when they were called a name that they did not like or a time they called someone a name to hurt him/her.

Have students write a new scene from *The Revealers*, where Richie, Burke, Jon, and Bethany are all in a support group to learn how to treat people as equals and how to make friends.

Science

Elliot and Catalina both have an interest in dinosaurs. Ask students to list all the dinosaurs that Elliot and Catalina mention. Use the Internet to research them; write a paragraph for each describing its behavior, and look for drawings of them. If a computer lab is available, they can create a PowerPoint presentation to show their findings, including a list of Web sites.

Using the scientific method of investigation, ask students to create a hypothesis to look at how the social behavior of dinosaurs could have been similar to the social behavior of humans. Reporting the findings to the class, the students should include a list of Web sites and references to *The Revealers*.

As a class, choose some people from history who, like Anne Frank, did not have the freedom to speak out. Put two or three of them in a chat room. What might they want to say about their isolation? Write the dialogue.

Social Studies

If bullying is about power — those who have power over those who do not — there should not be many surprises regarding who becomes a bully. Have the students work in pairs or small groups, and ask them to create a hierarchy of the social groups / school organizations / cliques in your school. Which groups are at the bottom, which are at the top? Remember, there are always people who can be in several groups and do not fit the rigid definitions of any single group.

Ms. Hogeboom said “The Revealer” was “bold and challenging. It’s like an underground newspaper.” (p. 107) How does she explain an underground newspaper? There were times in history that underground newspapers played a very important part in the lives of many people. Encourage students to research the history of the underground newspaper. After sharing the research, discuss the role underground newspapers have played in history.

Many forces, like her family, her ethnicity, and her nationality, influenced Anne Frank’s personality. Ask students to explore in an essay how those forces and others molded her identity. Then ask the students to look at similar forces in their own lives and explain how they have influenced their identities.

Technology

In *The Revealers*, several students tell how they were bullied through KidNet. However, the latest way to bully is through the Internet; it is called cyberbullying. There may be members of the class who have been cyberbullied. Students can go to www.cyberbullying.ca to learn what they can do to protect themselves.

About the Author

Born in Portland, Oregon, Doug Wilhelm grew up in New Jersey an avid reader and, in middle school, became an avid writer. Today he is a full-time self-employed writer. While he was growing up, he had a lot in common with Russell, the main character in *The Revealers*, including being the target of bullying. Those experiences and some insights from his son, Bradley, inspired Wilhelm to create *The Revealers*, which was nominated by teens across the country for the 2004 Teens Top Ten list of the American Library Association. Doug Wilhelm has published ten novels for young readers, including *Raising the Shades*, which has been nominated for the 2004–2005 Indiana Young Hoosier Book Award.

Doug, who grew to be six feet ten inches tall, his son, Bradley, and a cat named Willy presently live in Vermont.

For more on Doug Wilhelm:

Web sites:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Contains more information about Doug and his books.

www.the-revealers.com

Contains more about using the book in the classroom, an author interview, and useful Web site links.



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“Wilhelm takes a fresh path down some well-trodden territory in this book about bullying . . . Books like this make [readers] feel less alone.” — *Booklist*

“[Wilhelm] shines a harsh light on many facets of bullying and never, even at the novel’s rosier moments, implies that every bully is a good kid just waiting to be redeemed. Middle-schoolers will appreciate the honesty.”

— *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“Braiding a different twist on the old story of getting back at the school bullies, Wilhelm has created three characters with qualities that make them targets, but also make them capable of combining efforts and mounting a terrific, innovative defense . . . Will fascinate even reluctant readers.” — *School Library Journal*

“The promise of the modern age is that information equals power, and in Wilhelm’s entertaining and thoughtful tale, that notion is put to the test.” — *Publishers Weekly*

Also by Doug Wilhelm:

Raising the Shades

ISBN-10: 0-374-36178-9 · ISBN-13: 978-0-374-36178-5 · \$16.00

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This guide was prepared by C. J. Bott, educational consultant, retired English teacher, and author of *The Bully in the Book and in the Classroom*. A portion of the text of this guide appeared in *The Bully in the Book and in the Classroom* by C. J. Bott (Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004).