

California's Diversity: Past and Present

Lessons for the Fair Education Act of 2011

Lesson 5: Schools and Bullying

Overview

In this lesson, students learn about bullying and cyberbullying in schools. First, they read and discuss a brief article about the causes and effects of bullying and cyberbullying, with a special emphasis on anti-gay bullying. Then, working in structured small groups, they will be provided scenarios of possible bullying. In these groups, they will evaluate each scenario to determine whether it is a case of bullying and what the policy should be to address the bullying.

Time

One to two class periods.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define bullying and cyberbullying.
- Examine the causes and effects of bullying and cyberbullying.
- Explain the particular problem faced by schools in preventing and punishing bullying.
- Evaluate hypothetical scenarios of possible bullying.

Compliance With the Fair Education Act

This lesson is designed to comply with requirements under California Senate Bill 48 ("SB 48"), signed into law as the Fair Education Act in 2011. The act amended California Education Code Section 51204.5 to read as follows:

Instruction in social sciences shall include the early history of California and a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.

The act also amended California Education Code Section 60040 to direct governing boards to "include only instructional materials which, in their determination, accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society...."

Common Core State Standards Addressed

SL.8.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 8 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

WHST.8.1. Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.

a. Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

d. Establish and maintain a formal style.

e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Materials and Preparation

- Handout A: Schools and Bullying (one for each student)
- Handout B: A School Takes On Bullying (one for each student)

Procedure

A. Reading: Schools and Bullying

1. Focus Discussion. Assess prior knowledge of the students about bullying. Ask students: What does it mean to bully somebody?

Look for: It means to use force against somebody in a cruel way or to hurt somebody with words or actions for no reason, and to do it repeatedly.

Ask students: How many of you think you have witnessed bullying happen at school or away from school this year? *Keep a tally of the responses.*

2. Tell students: Today you are going to learn about the problem of bullying, how to recognize it, and what schools can do to prevent and punish bullying.

3. Distribute **Handout A: Schools and Bullying**. The reading should take approximately ten minutes.

4. After they have read, you may want to discuss the **For Discussion and Writing** questions:

- What is bullying? Why is it a problem? *Accept reasoned responses. Look for: victims suffer depression, anxiety, problems at school, and sometimes suicide. Bullies are more likely to drop out of school and commit crimes in adulthood.*
- Many believe that the Internet has made the problem of bullying worse. Do you agree? Why or why not? *Accept reasoned responses.*

- Why do schools face a dilemma about punishing a bully when the cyberbullying occurs or originates off campus? *Look for: Schools are only responsible for discipline of students on campus or at school-sponsored events. The question for schools is how to address off-campus behavior that might affect the school environment.*

5. Tell students that they will now look at examples of possible bullying and how a school can address them.

B. Activity: A School Takes On Bullying

1. Divide students into groups of four. Unless you have your own collaborative-learning practice in your class, each group should choose one person in each of the following roles for effective discussion:

Spokesperson: presents the results of the group's discussion to the class.

Recorder: takes notes of the discussion and prepares a summary of the main points of discussion to review with the Spokesperson.

Timekeeper: monitors the time available for discussion; keeps the group informed of time.

Facilitator: keeps the group on-task.

2. Distribute **Handout B: A School Takes On Bullying**. Read the instructions out loud with them, including the school's bullying policy. (NOTE: The policy is based on the California Department of Education's model school-policy on bullying.)

3. Instruct students that in their group, they will examine all ten scenarios and answer two questions for each:

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not?
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why?

4. Do not tell groups in advance which of the ten scenarios they will be responsible for reporting on.

5. Allow 10–15 minutes for discussion.

6. After discussion, have each Spokesperson share their group's answers for one or two of the scenarios. Depending on your class size, each group may share more than two scenarios. It is all right if some groups report on the same scenarios as other groups.

Notes for the Teacher on the Scenarios

1. Aldo and Max.

(1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *Shoving and name-calling are bullying.*

(2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses.*

2. Aldo and Max (Part 2).

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? Aldo's threat to punch Max is probably bullying.
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. Max's kick is not bullying but may be punishable under rules against fighting if it was not proportionate to Aldo's threat.*

3. Penelope and Rosetta.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *Expressions of frustration or anger are not inherently bullying.*
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Most likely not.*

4. Marla and William.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *The use of the Internet makes this an example of cyberbullying.*
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. It happened on-campus, so the school may discipline William and others.*

5. Herman and Stevie.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *The use of the Internet makes this an example of cyberbullying. It is social manipulation and therefore bullying under the school policy.*
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. It happened off-campus, but the violence against Alex may connect Herman and Stevie's actions to a disruptive school environment.*

6. Ben and Teresa.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *The use of the phrase "That's so gay!" is probably an example of bullying behavior based on sexual orientation, especially considering how it affected Ben.*
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. It depends on Teresa's knowledge of past harassment of Ben and on her intent in using the phrase.*

7. Teresa and Giovanni.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *Giovanni's deliberate attention toward Ben was taunting and is an example of social isolation.*
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses.*

8. Robert.

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? Robert's use of the word "lesbians" to tease others is name-calling and social isolation.
- (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses.*

9. Arnie and Edwin.

(1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *Arnie's e-mail is a direct threat to Edwin. The use of the phrase "bullet in you" is particularly disturbing.*

(2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. Remember the threat occurred off-campus on a Sunday.*

10. Lucy.

(1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not? *Because the shirt has a message that singles out "homosexuals," it is probably bullying under the school policy against social isolation.*

(2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why? *Accept reasoned responses. Keep in mind school dress codes in addition to the anti-bullying policy.*

C. Debrief

1. Debrief the activity. Questions to ask:

- Why is it important for schools to have anti-bullying policies?
Accept reasoned responses. Students may point to the cases of suicide or attempted suicide described in the reading. The model policy in the activity addresses the need for a "safe and healthy learning environment."
- Was it difficult for your group to agree on any of the scenarios? If so, why?
Accept reasoned responses.
- Do you think there is any amount of teasing that is acceptable at school? If so, what should the limit be?
Accept reasoned responses. Look for: "Teasing" that occurs between friends who are not likely to be offended by each other is probably good-natured or well-intentioned. However, if even that teasing involves anti-gay or other discriminatory language, it might be offensive or socially isolating to bystanders.

D. Reflection Activity (Optional)

1. Have students write a short essay answering the following question:

What should schools, parents, and communities do to prevent bullying?

2. Students may use information they learned in this lesson, from the activity, their own experience, and outside research. If they use outside research, they must provide citations to their sources.

Schools and Bullying

We often think schoolyard teasing is a normal part of growing up. Everyone seems to have experienced it or witnessed it in childhood. A good-natured joke between friends is one thing. Behavior that threatens students' safety and well-being is something else. We call such behavior bullying.

Bullying is a type of unwanted aggressive behavior by one student or students against others who are victims. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated. It also involves an imbalance of power. This means that the victim is weaker or more vulnerable than the bully.

Types of Bullying

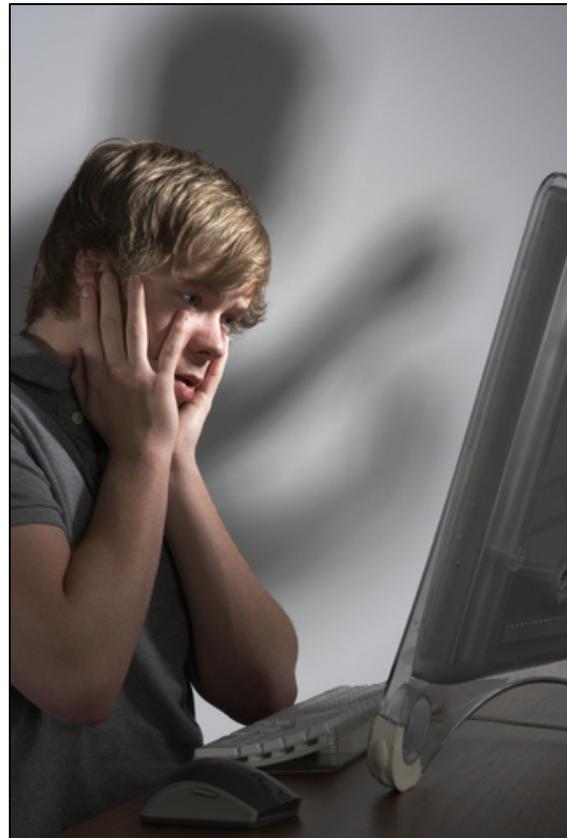
Bullying can be physical, verbal, or emotional abuse or harassment. In all cases, it involves a victim feeling intimidated. Physical bullying ranges from pushing and shoving to hitting and kicking, or worse.

Verbal and emotional bullying occur face-to-face or on the Internet. Bullying by electronic communication, like the Internet, is called "cyberbullying." Sometimes bullies reveal private information about people or spread rumors about them. Even verbal behavior can lead to emotional or physical harm. Bullying often involves discrimination, too, such as racism or "homophobia." Homophobia is prejudice against lesbian and gay persons.

Effects Of Bullying

In 2010, a Massachusetts 15-year-old named Phoebe Prince committed suicide. She had suffered face-to-face bullying by other students. They called her a "whore" and a "slut." They wrote mean-spirited comments on Facebook. One student threw a drink can at her from a moving car.

After her suicide, several teens were charged with criminal harassment. This is a misdemeanor crime. This means it can have a sentence of up to one year in jail. Five teens were sentenced to probation and community service.



Bullies often feel more uninhibited online than face-to-face. Psychologists call this the "disinhibition effect" of cyberbullying.

Victims like Phoebe Prince may suffer depression. Depression is a state of mind that includes feelings of shame and hopelessness. Victims may also have anxiety and loss of self-esteem. They might develop relationship problems with parents and friends.

Bullying can also harm victims' school life. Many victims' grades fall. They also might stay home because of depression or fear of harassment. Severe bullying problems can cause dropout rates to rise.

Students who bully are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school. Teenage bullies are more likely to be convicted of crimes in adulthood.

Anti-Gay Bullying

Anti-gay bullying is directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered ("LGBT") students. In 2011, almost 82 percent of LGBT students experienced verbal harassment at school. Over 38 percent experienced physical harassment. The harassment was a result of bullies' homophobia.

In the 1990s, several students at a high school near San Jose, California taunted and harassed another student named Alana Flores. In her locker, Alana found threatening anti-lesbian messages, one of which stated, "We'll kill you."

Around the same time in that same school district, a student named Freddie Fuentes suffered physical and verbal abuse. Freddie was beaten by a group of boys in seventh grade at a bus stop in front of a school bus driver. There and in class bullies called him derogatory words for being gay.

Alana, Freddie, and other victims faced another problem. They complained to school officials but said they were ignored. Worse, Alana and Freddie said they were told their complaints were "too much of a fuss." Alana attempted suicide in her senior year.

These students sued the school district for not trying to stop the bullying. In the case, the federal court of appeals ruled that when school officials know about anti-gay harassment, they must take steps to protect students. The school district also began training employees and students about how to stop anti-gay bullying.

Sometimes a bully might perceive a heterosexual student as LGBT. It is important to remember that anti-gay harassment against heterosexual students is unwanted aggressive behavior. Therefore, it is still bullying.

Schools and Cyberbullying

Cyberbullies might feel scared to say hurtful things in person. But on the Internet, they lose their fear. Social networks also allow cyberbullies to share hurtful messages with many others.

Schools face a dilemma about cyberbullying. Schools can punish bullying on campus. Much cyberbullying, however, starts off-campus. Cyberbullies might send messages from home computers or cell phones.

The California Education Code states that a student who engages in cyberbullying can be suspended or expelled. The code defines cyberbullying as "bullying committed by means of an electronic act...directed specifically toward a pupil or school personnel." To be punishable the cyberbullying must be "related to school activity."

In *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that schools could regulate student speech or expression that causes a "substantial interference" at the school. Sometimes, off-campus electronic acts interfere with school activity.

For Discussion and Writing

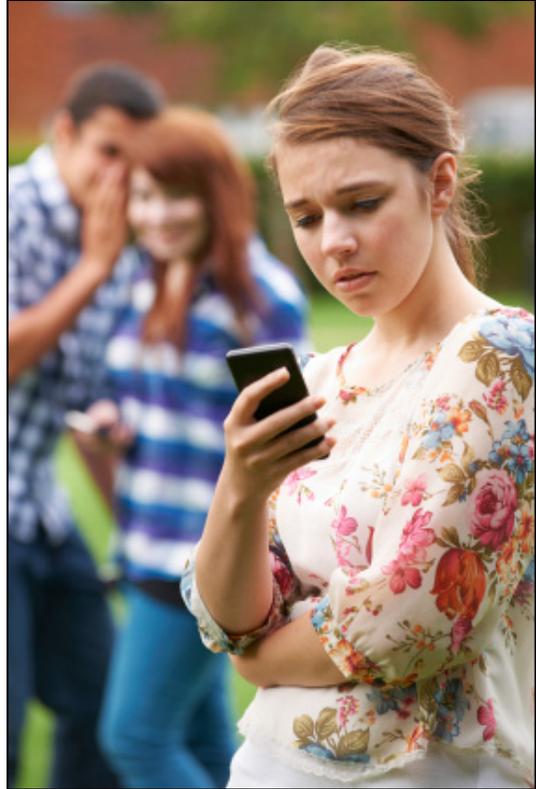
1. What is bullying? Why is it a problem?
2. Many believe that the Internet has made the problem of bullying worse. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. Why do schools face a dilemma about punishing a bully when the cyberbullying occurs or originates off campus?

A School Takes on Bullying

Each of the ten scenarios listed below involves an allegation of bullying at the hypothetical Fairville High School. The school has a policy on bullying:

The administration of Fairville High School believes that all students have a right to a safe and healthy school environment. The school will not tolerate behavior that infringes on the safety of any student. A student shall not intimidate or harass another student through words or actions. Such behavior includes: direct physical contact, such as hitting or shoving; verbal assaults, such as teasing or name-calling; and social isolation or manipulation. Any student who engages in bullying may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.

This policy applies to students on school grounds, while traveling to and from school or a school-sponsored activity, during the lunch period, whether on or off campus, and during a school-sponsored activity.



In small groups, look at the scenarios and answer these questions:

- (1) Is this an example of bullying? Why or why not?
 - (2) If so, what discipline should the school impose? Why?
1. Aldo is in 8th grade. Max is in 6th grade. In the school hallway during a passing period, Aldo shoves Max against a locker and says, "Step aside, punk!"
 2. In Scenario #1 above, Aldo pulls his fist back, as if he is going to hit Max. In defense, Max kicks Aldo in the stomach.
 3. Penelope and Rosetta work together on the Fairville High yearbook. They are usually friends, but have an argument over the artwork for the yearbook's cover. During lunch period, Penelope sends a text message to Rosetta. The message is "Don't talk to me today."
 4. Marla is a new student at school. In the school computer lab, William sets up a page on Facebook called "Marla Go Home!" Several students post derogatory messages about Marla's appearance, calling her a "slob" and a "loser." Marla sees the page and leaves early. She stays at home for several days.

5. One Saturday, Herman and Stevie create a Facebook page impersonating Alex, a student they dislike. At Herman's home, the two use Alex's name and a photo of Alex to set up the page. In Alex's name, they post messages insulting other students. When Alex arrives at school on Monday, three students who believe they were insulted by Alex punch and kick him.
6. In a lesson in English class, the students are discussing a novel. Ben is in a group with Teresa. Many students have made fun of Ben before, believing he is gay. During the discussion, Teresa reads something in the novel she does not like and says, "That's so gay!" Ben stops discussing the novel and stays silent for the rest of the class.
7. In Scenario #4 above, Teresa's friend Giovanni looks over at Ben after Teresa says "That's so gay!" Giovanni points at Ben, laughs, and says, "Just like you, Ben!"
8. Robert is a popular "class clown" and often "roasts" other students by making fun of them in front of small audiences during passing periods and after school. One day, Robert sees two girls walking down the hallway side-by-side. He shouts, "Lesbians coming through!" Other students laugh.
9. Arnie and Edwin do not get along. One Sunday afternoon, Arnie sends threatening e-mails to Edwin. One e-mail reads, "I hate your guts! How about I put a bullet in you when I see you at school tomorrow? How do you like that?"
10. Lucy wears a t-shirt to school that has this message on it: "Homosexuals will burn in hell!"

NOTE: This lesson is adapted from the CRF lesson "Cyberbullying: Laws and Policies" included in the case materials for the 2010 mock trial *People v. Woodson*. The reading and activity has been modified.