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When I Was Seven

STUDY GUIDE

From the John VanDuzer Children's Film Collection

Prepared by:

NEETU PINKERTON, B.Ed

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Message to the Educator

The Youth Learning Department at TIFF aims to provide children, youth and students with new academic opportunities and social experiences by exposing them to the language and vision of film. We are proud to introduce educators to the John VanDuzer Children's Film Collection. This initiative reflects our continuing commitment to educating and inspiring youth with the transformative powers of the moving image.

The collection, the first of its kind in the world, is empowered to purchase, archive and distribute the best children's and family films available from around the world. Developed with education experts, study guides accompany each film and are designed to address contemporary social issues and provide a wealth of synergistic programming with the Ontario Ministry of Education. For more information, please visit reellearning.ca, our online film-literacy resource for educators.

Synopsis

Country of Origin: Canada

Release Year: 2000

Original Language: English

Director: Jessica Bradford

Runtime: 9 minutes

Themes: Bullying, standing up for yourself, self-esteem

Grade Recommendation: 1 to 3

Tess is constantly terrorized by Nathan, a bully at school. Whenever Tess sees him, she feels threatened and runs away, the menacing boy in pursuit. Quite suddenly, Tess stops running and faces Nathan down. This extremely accomplished film succinctly captures a child's fear of schoolyard bullies, as well as the sombre and exultant moment when she realizes her power.

Ways into the Text

Through viewing the film *When I Was Seven* and by completing the activities suggested in this study guide, students will meet educational objectives in the following areas:

- Media Literacy
- Critical Literacy
- Anti-bullying/Character Education

Media Literacy: *When I Was Seven* is an incredible launching pad for teachers to delve into several expectations of the Media Literacy curriculum. Its short length makes it easy for students to watch the film multiple times to better comprehend the story elements they may have missed during their initial viewing. The film is therefore a great resource for analyzing implied messages and media codes and conventions.

Critical Literacy: Students will build on their critical literacy skills, particularly their ability to provide alternative perspectives to a text (e.g., telling the story from a bully's point of view).

Character Education: The issue of bullying is a relevant and meaningful topic for students, and the film presents a great opportunity for teachers to discuss this issue with their class.

Curriculum Applicability

The activities in this guide were developed based on the Ontario Curriculum. The corresponding Media Literacy expectations for the suggested activities target grades 1, 2 and 3, but they can easily be modified to meet any grade.

Activity	Curriculum Expectations
<p>DEVELOPING CRITICAL LITERACY SKILLS – Creating a Storyboard from the Bully’s Perspective</p>	<p>Understanding Media Texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Purpose and Audience Grade 3: Identify the purpose and intended audience of some media texts (“simple media texts” for grades 1 and 2). 1.5 Point of View Identify (“initially with support and direction” for grades 1 and 2) whose point of view is presented (“or reflected” for Grade 3) in a media text (“simple media text” for grades 1 and 2) and suggest how the text might change if a different point of view were used. <p>Creating Media Texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.4 Producing Media Texts Grades 2 and 3: Produce media texts (“some short media texts” for Grade 1) for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques. Note: While this activity is designed to develop critical literacy skills, it may also be used to talk about character education. For example, it encourages <i>empathy</i> in terms of understanding what a bully might feel (when often the focus is on what the victim feels).
<p>MEDIA LITERACY – Analyzing Codes, Conventions and Implied Messages</p>	<p>Understanding Media Texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.2 Making Inferences/Interpreting Messages Grades 1 and 2: Identify (“initially with support and direction” for Grade 1) overt and implied messages in simple media texts. Grade 3: Use overt and implied messages to draw inferences and make meaning in simple media texts. <p>Understanding Media Forms, Conventions and Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2 Conventions and Techniques Grades 1 and 2: Identify (“initially with support and direction” for Grade 1) the conventions and techniques used in some familiar media forms (“and explain how they help convey meaning” for Grade 3).
<p>CHARACTER EDUCATION AND MEDIA – Creating an Anti-Bullying Public Service Announcement or Poster</p>	<p>Creating Media Texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.4 Producing Media Texts Grades 2 and 3: Produce media texts (“some short media texts” for Grade 1) for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques. <p>Character Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through this activity, students will learn about the roles in bullying, the types of bullying, the types of bystanders and the appropriate actions to take when bullying is encountered. Students will learn ways to effectively deal with bullying – whether they are the target, bully or bystander.

Activity One: Creating a Storyboard from the Bully's Perspective

Pre-Screening Preparation:

Ask students to think about the following questions as they watch the film:

1. Whose point of view is *presented* in the film? How does the viewer know this?
2. Whose point of view is *missing*?
3. Who would watch this film? That is, who is the *intended audience*?
4. What *purpose* does this film serve for the intended audience?

Post-Screening Discussion:

Use the questions above to generate a discussion on point of view and audience. This discussion will help prepare students for the production activity.

Production Activity:



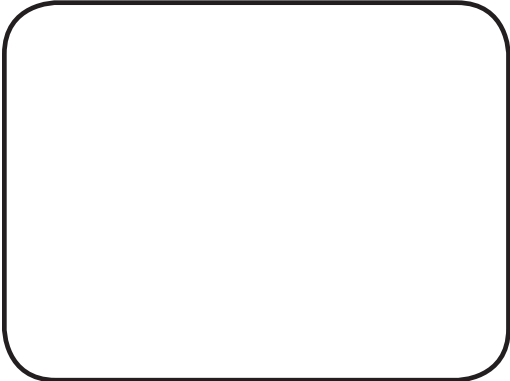
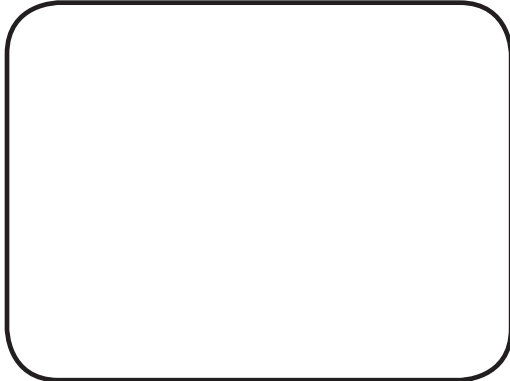


It will be clear to students after viewing the film that the point of view being presented is that of the “victim” and the point of view missing is that of the “bully.” Students will create a short story from the bully’s perspective and then create storyboards of their story. **Option:** If teachers have the time or resources, they may wish to have students dramatize the activity and create a short film. Or, instead of videotaping their production, students may use photographs to create a digital storybook (this minimizes the need for editing).

Students should use the ideas generated from the discussion to effectively tell a story from the bully’s perspective. Below are some ways to get students thinking from a bully’s point of view:

- Read the book *Talking about Bullying* by Jillian Powell (pages 12 to 13 discuss a bully’s perspective).
- Have a discussion with the class about why someone might bully others.
 - What might be going on in someone’s life that would make him or her act this way?
 - Is the confidence bullies demonstrate real or just an act?
 - Why do you think the bully in the film may have wanted to collect Tess’s charms? (For example, taking them may have given Nathan a sense of power).
 - What might be happening in Nathan’s life to make him feel inferior or powerless?

Using the story they have written, students should create storyboards outlining what happens in their story. Show students how to use a storyboard (page 6) to help them map out their ideas. Talk to them about how they might visually show in their storyboard what’s really going on in the life or mind of a bully.

Storyboard

Activity Two: Analyzing Codes, Conventions and Implied Messages

The film *When I Was Seven* is a valuable resource for teaching students about making inferences and interpreting messages in media. It is also effective for analyzing the conventions and techniques filmmakers use to help an audience understand implicit messages.

Students may need to watch the film several times to recognize all the ideas, clues, codes and conventions they may have missed during their initial viewing. Each time you view the film with your students, direct their attention to different details (as suggested in the teacher prompts below).

1. How does the director imply that time has elapsed?

Students may miss the slight changes to Tess's hairdo and clothing; as a result, they may also miss the implied lapse in time. Explain to students how the use of different shirts and hairdos indicates new scenes or the passage of time.

View the short film for a second time so that students can notice the following:

- First, Tess is wearing her hair down with a red sweater (she is having a flashback to when she was seven).
- Then, her hair is half up and she is wearing a grey sweater.
- Next, her hair is in braids and she is again wearing a grey sweater.
- Her hair is in a ponytail and she is wearing a T-shirt.
- Finally, her hair is back to being half up and she is wearing a grey sweater.

2. What film conventions are used to illustrate that Tess is having a flashback? How do we know that she is having a flashback?

Students should notice that special effects such as white flash transitions (as opposed to fading to black) and slow motion are conventions used to lead into flashbacks or dreamlike scenes.

3. How does the audience know what Nathan, the bully, wants? Why is Tess so afraid of him? What evidence in the film supports your thoughts?

Students should notice that Nathan's motivations are implied through the following shots:

- The director uses close-up shots of the charms to suggest they are important.
- The way Tess interacts with her charms (holding on to them tightly) suggests they are something precious. She's trying to protect them from being taken away. We know that Nathan must want her charms even though this is never explicitly stated in the film.
- The scene in which Nathan dangles his collection of charms implies that stealing charms from others gives him a sense of power.

Activity Three: Creating an Anti-Bullying Public Service Announcement or Poster

Pre-Screening Preparation:

Talk to students about

- **The roles in bullying:** bully, target, bystander
- **Types of bullying:** physical, exclusionary, cyber, verbal
- **Inappropriate action by a bystander:** cheering, watching, ignoring, not reporting
- **Appropriate action by a bystander:** reporting, walking away with the person being targeted
- **Appropriate action by the target:** say NO firmly, GO away and TELL someone you trust

Post-Screening Activity:

Students will choose to create either an anti-bullying public service announcement (PSA) *or* a poster.

Students will decide who their message is intended to reach. In other words, is the PSA or poster designed for bystanders, targets or bullies?

The PSA or poster should contain one of the following messages (or students may come up with their own):

Intended Audience	Message
<p style="text-align: center;">Bystanders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report bullying when you see it. • Don't be a bystander. • Bystanders are as guilty as bullies. You can make a difference. <p>(Note: these tips can be found at www.sorenbennick.com/power_of_one.html)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say NO . . . then GO and TELL someone! • Bullying hurts!
<p style="text-align: center;">Bullies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying is not the answer.

Public Service Announcement Guidelines:

Have students view a couple of anti-bullying PSAs (you may find videos in your library or on youtube.com) and discuss the codes and conventions they use. Students are encouraged to follow the codes and conventions of a PSA when creating their own.

1. Students will work in groups of three to five. As a group, they will decide on a message for their PSA (e.g., “Bullying hurts!”).
2. Students will use the storyboard (provided on page 6 of this guide) to plan their ideas before taping their PSA.
3. Once the storyboard is complete, students are ready to record their PSA. Encourage students to use in-camera editing. For example, they can pause the camera when a scene is complete or use the chalkboard to create titles. This will eliminate the need for editing.
4. The PSA should be 30 to 60 seconds long.

Poster Guidelines:

1. Talk to students about the codes and conventions of poster design, including the use of text. Show examples of posters and direct students’ attention to the use of different types and sizes of lettering; how the pictures tell the reader an implied message; and the use of colour.
2. Students will create an anti-bullying poster using a few of the codes and conventions discussed.

Additional Resources on Character Education

For more lesson ideas on character education around the theme of bullying, check out these books:

1. Beane, Allan L. *The Bully Free Classroom: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8*. Free Spirit Publishing, 2005.
2. Espeland, Pamela, Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael. *A Teacher’s Guide to “Stick Up for Yourself!: Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem.”* Free Spirit Publishing, 2000.
3. Palomares, Susanna, and Dianne Schilling. *How to Handle a Bully*. Jalmar Press, 2002.
4. Teolis, Beth. *Ready-to-Use Conflict-Resolution Activities for Elementary Students*. John Wiley & Sons, 2002.

About Bell Lightbox

Currently under construction, Bell Lightbox, a breathtaking five-storey complex located in downtown Toronto, will provide a permanent home for film lovers to celebrate cinema from around the world and will propel TIFF forward as an international leader in film culture. Designed by innovative architecture firm KPMB, Bell Lightbox’s fluid structure encourages exploration, movement and play. The campaign to build Bell Lightbox is generously supported by founding sponsor Bell, the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, the King and John Festival Corporation consisting of the Reitman family and the Daniels Corporation RBC as major sponsor and official bank, Visa†, the Copyright Collective of Canada, NBC Universal Canada, the Allan Slaight Family, the Brian Linehan Charitable Foundation and CIBC. The Board of Directors, staff and many generous individuals and corporations have also contributed to the campaign. For more information on the Bell Lightbox campaign, visit belllightbox.ca.