

BULLY: Story Synopses

Alex, 14 Sioux City, Iowa

“I feel good when I’m in this house and when I’m with my family. Maya, my sister, she is annoying, but that’s normal for a sister. Then there’s Ethan, he’s my six-year-old brother. He got all A’s in preschool through kindergarten. I’m proud of him for that. Then there’s Jada, she talks a lot. Then there’s Logan, my two-year-old brother, then my mama and my dad. And then there’s me.”



Alex has spent the summer trying not to think about what might happen when he returns to school, where for years he’s been punched, choked, sat on, had things stolen from him, and called names. Alex has Asperger’s

Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder that often affects one’s social interactions. Feeling powerless to stop his torment at school, Alex is forced to worry about his role as a big brother when his younger sister enters the middle school the following school year. As Alex endures another school year of being bullied, his parents struggle to get him to talk to them about his experiences at school, and they are unsettled by the school’s inability to keep him safe.

“I feel kind of nervous going back to school cause . . . I like learning, but I have trouble making friends,” Alex says as the summer ends. “People think that I’m different, I’m not normal. Most kids don’t want to be around me. I feel like I belong somewhere else.”

Guiding Questions

How do people respond when they encounter a difference that they do not understand? Why are students with special needs often targeted by bullies?

What can parents and school officials do to help a child who is bullied? What kind of responses can help and what kind might make matters worse? When is adult intervention most helpful?

Kelby, 16 Tuttle, Oklahoma

“You know what my philosophy about rain is? You know when people can’t hold it anymore, they cry? The world is taking so much in, it can’t hold anymore. That’s why it rains. Because it’s letting go.”



After Kelby came out as gay, teachers and administrators turned a blind eye when she was beat up by boys in between classes and run down by a carful of classmates, puncturing the windshield with her head. Though her

parents have offered to move to another town, Kelby returns to school in the fall filled with determination to stand up to her tormentors—and graduate with honors. As much as she is buoyed by a small group of friends, her determination is challenged throughout the year by students and adults alike.

“You can always count on something happening when you’re walking down the hall at school, in the classroom, after school when I’m walking home, when I’m walking through the parking lot in the morning to school. I wasn’t welcomed at church. I’m not welcomed in a lot of people’s homes. I know [my friends] get called gay just for hanging out with me.”

Guiding Questions

What are the sources of Kelby’s strength and optimism? How is she able to face the bullying she endures with such determination?

Why are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) youth so often singled out for bullying and harassment in middle and high school? How does bullying reflect larger societal conflicts and attitudes?

The Longs Chattsworth, Georgia



"From the day Tyler was born, I was probably the proudest dad in the world. Because he was the firstborn; he was the first son. He always had that laugh about him, I don't know, it was infectious, it caught you."



On October 17th, 2009, Tyler Long killed himself. Tina and David Long mourn the loss of their son, whom they tried to protect after years of relentless bullying, and they take to task the school system that failed him so miserably.

"Tyler wasn't the most athletic," his dad says. "When he was in PE, he was always the last one to be [chosen]. Nobody would be on his team, because they said he was a geek and a fag and they didn't want to play with him. And it took a toll on him early in middle school. To where he, he cried, and then it got to the point where he didn't cry anymore. And that's when it became difficult to truly understand what he was going through."

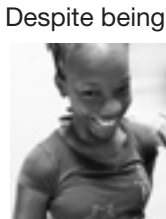
Guiding Questions

Who bears responsibility for the effects of bullying? What can we learn from the parents of a bullied child? How might they make a positive difference in their community? How should communities respond to suicides by young people who are bullied? How can they protect young people from the despair caused by bullying?

Ja'Meya, 14 Yazoo County, Mississippi



Looking around Ja'Meya's bedroom, her mother says, "This is her comfort zone, to herself. She was a basketball player. These are her trophies, her awards. Got her names on 'em and everything. She was an honor student. Yeah, she is an honor student."



Despite being an athlete and a top student, Ja'Meya was picked on every morning and afternoon of her hour-long bus ride through Mississippi. "It all started back when school first began and there was a lot of kids on the bus saying things about me," she explains. "I tried my best to tell an adult, but it got worse." Ja'Meya finally had enough. On the bus, she took out the gun she

found in her mother's closet. Although no one on the bus was harmed, Ja'Meya was arrested and charged with 45 felony accounts.

As they wait for the criminal justice system to determine her fate, Ja'Meya's family struggles to understand how she could have become so desperate.

Guiding Questions

How do you explain Ja'Meya's decision to bring a gun on the school bus? What do you think should be the consequences for her action? Does it matter that she did not intend to hurt anyone? How might race influence the way that people respond to her story? How might it influence your understanding of the situation?

The Smalleys Perkins, Oklahoma



"We'd go and work on our clubhouse," says Trey, Ty Field-Smalley's best friend. "It's way back out in the woods and no one but me and Ty knows where it is. We would just entertain ourselves for about five hours, it would feel like 30 minutes. Just hanging out, having a good time."



At age 11, Ty took his own life. He had been bullied repeatedly. "Even when people would bully him, I'd get so angry, and I could have hurt those kids so badly that done something to him," says Trey. "Like they'll push him down, and say, 'Shut up, spaz,' or throw him into a locker, or shove him into one. And I'd just go to take off after them and he'd be like, 'Trey, it isn't worth it, be better than them, it's all right,' and he'd walk off with a smile. And I don't know how he could do it. He was way stronger than I was."

Ty's suicide has motivated his parents to create the organization Stand for the Silent, to empower students to stop bullying. Ty's father, Kirk Smalley, has vowed, "I'll fight bullying wherever it's found. Schools. Workplace. I'm not going to quit until bullying does."

Guiding Questions

As you watch the film, what does the Smalleys' story make you think about and feel? How important are friends in the life of one who is bullied? How can friends help? How much power do individuals, and individual families, have to create change in our society?