



## LESSON PLAN: USING LITERATURE AS A TOOL TO END NAME-CALLING

**OVERVIEW:** *Bibliotherapy*, or the guided use of books to help solve problems, can be used to address name-calling, both by supporting the targets of bullying as they express their feelings and learn coping strategies, and by helping those who bully to increase their empathy for others. Stories that offer empowering and realistic ways to cope with and resolve problems can be used to take students through the following three stages:

1. **Identification:** The students identify with the central character in the story.
2. **Catharsis:** The students become emotionally involved in the story, and are able to express emotions in a safe and structured setting, through discussion, artwork, or role-play.
3. **Insight:** The students become aware that their own problems might be addressed or solved, and are able to pose possible solutions to the story character's and their own situations.

The following lesson plan is a model for facilitating a group bibliotherapy session that can be adapted to suit the book of your choice. An excerpt from Judy Blume's *Blubber* is offered as an example, and activities are suggested that guide students through the three-step therapeutic process. *Blubber* is the story of Jill, a fifth-grader who cruelly picks on Linda about her weight, partly in order to gain the approval of the class leader, Wendy. There are several scenes that depict bullying in the book, which are all useful for class discussions and activities. This lesson focuses on Chapter 7, in which Linda gets harassed during lunchtime because she is on a diet. Later that night, Jill, who participated in the teasing, talks to her mother about what she would do if anyone were to call her a name.

### OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce students to literature that provides realistic and thought provoking depictions of name-calling and bullying
- To increase students' identification with targets of bullying, and to develop their sense of empathy toward others
- To help students identify safe and empowering ways to cope with and respond to name-calling and bullying in their lives

**AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL:** Grades 6-8

**TIME:** At least 90 minutes or two class periods

**MATERIALS:** Copies of reading from *Blubber* (Chapter 7, beginning with paragraph 27, "At



lunchtime, Wendy and Caroline traded sandwiches,” until end of chapter) or other suitable reading material; pens; paper; and art materials if necessary.

## PROCEDURE:

### PART 1—INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY (15 MINUTES)

Seat students in a circle so that they can all see each other, encouraging group interaction and discouraging private conversations or remarks that poke fun at sensitive subject matter. Ask students a few introductory questions to get the class interested, and to get them thinking about the topic. Some questions that can be used to introduce *Blubber* are:

- What is “lookism”?
- Where do we get messages about what is attractive? How do the messages affect us?
- Do you think people should be judged based on appearance?
- Is it right to call people names that mock their appearance?

Tell the students you will be reading an excerpt from Judy Blume’s book, *Blubber* (or introduce your alternative reading). Explain that it deals with a young person being bullied by classmates because of her appearance. Distribute copies of the excerpt from Chapter 7.

### PART 2—READING (30 MINUTES)

Select volunteers to read the excerpt aloud. Stop the reading in appropriate places to ask thought provoking questions or begin short discussions. The questions should encourage students to identify with the victim of the bullying, and to consider the moral implications of the action in the story. From time to time, summarize what has occurred in the reading, so that the message doesn’t get lost. Below are some suggestions for places to stop and questions to ask during the reading of the excerpt from *Blubber*:

Stop after Linda tells the other girls that she is going to lose ten pounds, and ask:

- How do you think Caroline, Wendy and Jill feel about messages regarding attractiveness?
- About judging people based on appearance?
- How do you think Linda feels about the importance of looks?
- How does she cope with the judgment of others?
- How do you think Linda feels about being called “blubber” by the other girls?
- How do you think she feels about having her food scrutinized?

Stop after Wendy finishes bullying Linda, and ask:

- How does it make you feel to read about somebody being bullied like this?
- What do you think is going on in Linda’s mind as Wendy picks on her?



- How might Wendy’s actions affect Linda in the long term?
- Why didn’t any of the other students intervene? Would you have intervened?

At the end of the reading, after Jill has talked to her mother, ask:

- Tracy punched somebody who called her a name. Is that an effective response to being name-called?
- Jill’s mother suggests “laughing it off” as a way to cope with being bullied. Is this an effective response?
- Do you think Wendy would have left Linda alone if Linda had “laughed it off”?
- Jill says Linda “lets everybody walk all over her.” Do you agree? Does Linda try to stand up for herself?
- Jill says Linda “looks for it.” Do you agree? Do people “look” to be bullied?
- How do you imagine Linda was feeling that evening as she anticipated another day at school?

### **PART 3— REFLECTION (5 MINUTES)**

It’s important to give students a few minutes to quietly reflect on the reading. This is a good time to ask students to do some journal writing on the piece. We suggest a list-making activity for the *Blubber* reading. Let the students know that they won’t have to share their responses with anyone. Ask students to list various one-word descriptions that come to mind under the following headings:

- Linda is...
- Wendy is...
- When I was picked on, I felt...
- When I hurt another person with names, I felt...

### **PART 4— FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES (30 MINUTES)**

At this point, your students will hopefully have begun to feel some identification with the main character of the reading, and might be experiencing strong emotions about their own experiences with name-calling. There are many activities you can do to help facilitate the experience of catharsis. Some ideas are:

- In-depth discussion of the reading (for example, right and wrong, morals, strong and weak points of the characters)
- Putting the characters “on trial”
- Art activities, such as drawing story events or creating collages that illustrate the story’s theme

In the case of *Blubber*, we suggest considering the second part of the reading, in which Jill is at home in bed, talking to her mother. Ask students to imagine Linda in her home, talking to her mother about what happened to her in class. Ask them to write a response in the voice of Linda’s



mother. What could she say to make Linda feel better? What advice could she give Linda?

#### **PART 5— CLOSURE (TIME WILL VARY)**

The final activity should allow students to pose solutions to the character's dilemma. Again, there are a variety of means through which insight can be achieved. Students can:

- Brainstorm a list of possible solutions
- Role-play alternatives in which the character successfully stands up for her/himself, or in which other characters intervene to end the name-calling
- Create comic strips that demonstrate possible solutions
- Write alternative endings to the reading

Any of these activities would be appropriate for the *Blubber* excerpt. Remind students that there are many ways to deal with the problem of name-calling, and that not all solutions need be confrontational. In some solutions, Linda might not be ready to confront her bullies. Instead, she might write in her journal to deal with her feelings, join a club where she could make some friends who share her interests, or talk to a trusted friend or family member who always makes her feel good about herself. A discussion of the solutions posed should follow the activity you choose. Encourage students to consider which solutions seem to be most useful, and whether any of them perpetuate bullying and hurtful behavior.

*The article, Bibliotherapy, by Tom McIntyre was used as a resource for this lesson by permission of the author. It can be found at <http://www.behavioradvisor.com>.*