

Say Something

Peggy Moss

Illustrated by Lea Lyon

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Children / Character Education; Grades 3-6



Summary

At this school, some kids push and tease and bully. Sometimes they hurt others by just ignoring them. One girl sees it happening, but she would never do these mean things herself. Then one day something happens that shows her that being a silent bystander isn't enough. She finally builds up the courage to sit next to the girl who always gets made fun of and finds out that she's really funny!

This book will lead to discussions about

- Bullying and teasing
- Saying something vs. remaining silent
- Friendship
- Insecurities as reasons for bullying
- How to confront someone who is being hurtful
- The effects of being excluded.

Before You Read

Background

It starts with words. Before any student gets beaten up or badly hurt, there is usually teasing, sometimes months of name-calling that leads up to an act of violence. And even when no physical violence results, the student who is teased at school feels scared, distracted, and unable to focus on school. Kids get teased because they need extra help in class. Kids get teased because they are smart, work hard, or get good grades or special praise from the teacher. Kids get teased because they don't wear the right clothes—because they are old or worn or dirty or too new or clean. Kids get teased because of the way they smell, how much money they have, where they live, the color of their skin, if

they have an accent, the way they walk, or because they can't walk or see or hear as well as other kids. *Say Something* shows children that by not saying anything you are enabling the bully's behavior. The back of the book gives advice on what kids can say if they or someone else is getting teased or picked on.

Access Prior Knowledge

- Do kids in our school get teased?
- What do kids get teased about at our school?
- How do you think it feels?
- Do you think YOU could make a big difference for kids in our school?
- Are those things easy to do, or hard? Why?

After You Read

Activity

Speak Out!

Bring a speaker to your school or start a school anti-bullying campaign. There are many new and different programs being developed for school-based approaches. A good place to start is Don't Laugh at Me. Originally a song and then a book by Steve Seskin and now a program run by Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary. Operation Respect is free and has been used in thousands of schools. www.operationrespect.org.

Remember—YOU are the very best person to bring a change to your school.

If you think you are too small to make a difference, you have never been in a tent with a mosquito.

—African proverb

The Dot Game

Objectives: This is a simple exercise that consistently brings about great conversations among students and teachers about the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion by examining the nonverbal patterns that they use to group themselves. Students will think about the unintentional consequences of those patterns: Some kids are left out; other kids are not given a chance to share who they are. This activity encourages them to see ways to change behavior patterns and become more sensitive and inclusive.

Materials:

Round stickers ("color coding labels") in four different colors, typically available at a business supply or stationery store for use in filing. You must have enough labels to put one sticker on each child's forehead. Keep in mind that you will use only two of one color, and many of the other three.

What to look out for:

Silence is the key to this game. In order to make it work, students may need to push or direct each other (because, in the absence of words, this is how they will communicate). If need be, direct students to be gentle and thoughtful. The wording of your directions is KEY. Do not help them organize, because if you do, the purpose of the exercise will be lost. It is key for them to form groups on their own.

Steps:

In advance: Decide what color stickers you will place on students' heads. Reserve one color, for example yellow, and carefully decide which two students will receive the yellow dots. Yellow dots should go on students capable of handling a discussion about exclusion, and should not go on kids typically excluded or teased, as it may be too hard to handle. The rest of the students will be fairly evenly divided between red, blue, and green dots, so that there are at least five in each group. (For smaller groups, use fewer colors). If there are mirrors in the room, cover them up.

To begin the exercise:

- Ask students to do this exercise in complete silence. Instruct them to imagine that their lips are snapped closed. If need be, tell them to close their lips with their fingers.
- Divide the students to form a line in front of the teacher. (Or two lines, one in front of each adult in the room.)
- Ask the first student in line to close his or her eyes. Place a dot on his/her head (comfortably above the nose and to the extent possible, below the hair, so that it can be seen easily). Once the dot is affixed, tell the student that s/he can open his/her eyes and may roam around the room—IN SILENCE. Do the same for the next student being sure to give only two students a yellow dot. Students are not allowed to look at the dots on their own heads.
- Once all of the students have dots, say, "Okay, what I would like you to do is to organize yourselves. I'd like you to do this in complete silence, which means you'll have to think of other ways (silent and gentle ways) to communicate with each other. Once you have organized yourselves, sit down."
- If students ask "by color?" or other questions, simply reiterate, "Organize . . . in silence . . . and when you are organized, sit down."

While the kids "organize":

PAY ATTENTION, so that you will be able to tell them what you see happen. Watch what the kids do in order to get into their positions. Yellow dots will approach and be rejected a number of times until they find each other. (These students must be strong enough students to be able to talk about exclusion and not feel rejected by the game.)

- How they organized themselves. (They will say by color, and probably they are.)
- Ask why they organized by color. (They will say you wanted them to, but you didn't say that—try to help them recognize that they organized by color because it was easy, it was obvious, and maybe they THOUGHT that's what you wanted, which is natural).
- Are there times at school when you organize in the easiest or most obvious way? When? How? (give location hints if needed—on the bus, who do you sit with, in the cafeteria, outside—based on who you live near?)
- Look at the yellows. How are you organized?

- What happened to you (yellow dots) when you attempted to join this group? That group? (Not one of us—not a match.)
- When we organize in the easiest way possible, are there students who get treated like the yellow dots? (Not names here, just the reality, of course). For example, are there times when we get on the bus and are told, "No, someone is sitting here, or this table in the cafeteria is reserved?"

Once the kids have had a chance to talk about why they organized the way they did:

Ask if they'd like to try again.

- Say: " See if you can be a little bit more creative about how you organize." Let them try a couple of different ways—all in silence, and after each organization, let them talk about the way they are organized—by hair color, gender, shoes—and also how they communicated that to each other without using words.
- Ask: "Now how many of you think you are capable of mixing it up at school? Try it. How will you know what you have in common if you don't talk to somebody? You've got to say something in order to find out, because sharing the same color dot is not the only way we decide who we will have fun with. Raise your hand if you think you can mix it up."

When the kids go out for lunch or recess:

Remind them, and later ask them how they did. Let them talk about how hard it is to reach out—to sit next to somebody who sits alone usually or whom they don't know.

Recommend pairing up—two of you sit with someone new. And acknowledge that this is **HARD WORK** and it takes practice—and that they are doing **REALLY, REALLY** important work for making a change in their school.

For Further Discussion

- Discuss the following quote by Civil Right Attorney, Thom Harnett: "One person speaking up makes more noise than a thousand people who remain silent."
- How can you reach out to someone in your school who is always left out?

For Further Reading

Our Friendship Rules by Peggy Moss and Dee Dee Tardif (Tilbury House, 2011)

Dazzled by the glamour of a new girl at school, Alexandra is willing to do anything to get to be her friend—including betray the secrets of her best friend, Jenny. When she realizes what she's done, Alexandra makes things right.

Internet Resources

You may find the following Internet resources helpful as your students continue to explore the topic of the book.

PACERKidsAgainstBullying

A creative, innovative and educational website designed for elementary school students to learn about bullying prevention, engage in activities and be inspired to take action

<http://www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org/kab/>

The Bully Project

The BULLY Project is the social action campaign inspired by the award-winning film BULLY

<http://www.thebullyproject.com>