

TO THIS DAY: For the Bullied and Beautiful

by Shane Koyczan • Lesson Plan prepared by Marla Conn, MS Ed.

Genre: Poetry

Themes: Anti-bullying

Suitable for: Grades 5+

To This Day

Born of the author's own experiences as a child, this extraordinary poem expresses not only the devastating effects of bullying, but also the strength and inner resources that allow people to move beyond the names they're called. Originally an animated video, To This Day went viral, racking up over 13 million hits.

Now this remarkable poem has been adapted into a moving and visually arresting book with illustrations by thirty different artists. Each page is a vibrant collage of words and images that will resonate with anyone who has experienced bullying, whether as a victim, observer, or participant.

Bullying has become a HUGE problem in schools, neighborhoods, and communities all over the world. Statistics tell us that 1 in every 3 students will be bullied, 1 in 3 students bully someone, and 9 out of 10 students have been bystanders. The fact is that EVERYONE involved in bullying is hurt by it.

Did you know that there is actually a day designated for anti-bullying awareness?

Anti-Bullying Day (a.k.a. Pink Shirt Day) originated in Canada and is best known in North America. It takes place on the last Wednesday of February or the second Thursday in September. It originally started as a protest against a bullying incident at Central Kings Rural High School in Nova Scotia, when a grade nine student, Charles McNeill, arrived at school wearing a pink shirt. On Anti-Bullying Day, many of those who participate wear pink to symbolize a stand against bullying.

The activities listed here are based on the objectives described at the beginning of each section. Common Core standards are noted throughout.

BEFORE READING

The following speaking and listening skills will ensure that students engage in a range of meaningful, collaborative discussions that allow them to demonstrate the ability to initiate, participate, propel, and respond to topics, ideas, and texts.

- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on middle- and high-school topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. **SL.9-12.1,1a,1b,1c,1d**

1. Have each student look at the questions, reflect, and discuss in small groups.
 - Bullying/harassment occurs within our school community.
 - I have personally witnessed, perpetrated, or been a target of bullying involving members of our school community.
 - Students who are, or who are perceived to be, _____, are targets of bullying at our school.
 - I understand what it feels like to be ridiculed, harassed, or hurt because of who I am.
 - I believe that the student body at this school has the power to do something about bullying.
 - I believe that adults, including parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators at this school have the power to do something about bullying.
 - What would you do if you saw or heard someone being bullied?
 - If I had the chance to talk privately to the person being bullied, I would tell him/her_____.
 - What are good strategies for dealing with feelings of hurt and despair?
2. Discuss: Shane Koyczan wrote, "Writing was a way of escaping my real life, a way to cope with cruelty and indifference." Describe other ways that people use to cope with hurt.

3. What is a spoken word poem? Define the characteristics: use of concrete language, repetition, rhyme, attitude, persona, performance, memorization.
4. How do spoken word poems help us understand what the author is trying to convey?
5. How does an author's background influence his writing?
6. How does the author's point of view contribute to the authenticity of the poem? RL.9-12.6

DURING READING

7. Shane Koyczan made a point to write this book for "the bullied and beautiful." What do you think he meant by that? RL.9-12.1,2
8. Evaluate how the author uses the following poetic devices in *To This Day*. Find examples from the poem. **RL.9-12.1,2,4**
 - Use of concrete language
 - Repetition
 - Rhyme
 - Attitude
 - Persona
 - Performance
 - Memorization
9. Analyze how the illustrations contribute to the author's message and the overall effect he wishes to create. Give examples of how they convey meaning, feeling, and attitude.
10. How do Koyczan and the illustrators use symbols to represent objects and concepts?
11. How is the theme reflected through the character's behavior and events? **RL.9-12.1,2**

The following language and vocabulary skills ensure that students will be able to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text, including figurative and connotative meaning. They will also be able to analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- Interpret figures of speech in context and analyze their role in the text.
- Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

L.9-12.3,5,5a,5b/ RL.9-12.4

12. Give examples of how Koyczan uses figurative language to enhance meaning and tone.

AFTER READING

The following literacy skills help students integrate knowledge and ideas, comparing and analyzing multiple versions of a poem presented in many different artistic mediums and media formats.

- Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to make informed decisions and solve problems; evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data. **SL.11-12.2**
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. **RL.9-12.7**

13. Research the various videos, TV broadcasts (TED Talks), and music associated with *To This Day*.

14. How do the video/music interpretations compare to the written text?

15. After watching the video, evaluate how Shane Koyczan uses posture, eye contact, projection, enunciation, facial expression, and gestures during his performances. How do these affect his message?

16. After reading the poem, why do you think Shayne Koyczan wrote *To This Day*?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

The following writing skills enable students to communicate experiences in an organized, engaging way using narrative techniques.

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and a particular tone and outcome.
- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

W.9-12.3,3a,3b,3c,3d,3e

17. Create a “spoken word poem” in response to Shayne Koyczan’s message.

18. How did Koyczan’s attitude toward the topic translate into your attitude? Did it have an impact on your value system?

19. Write down your thoughts about bullying/harassment and the climate of acceptance and tolerance at our school. What do you think teachers and administrators need to know? What do you think your fellow classmates need to know? **W.9--12.4**

20. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making; set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed. Discuss what makes people feel connected. What can a community achieve that individuals cannot? Why? **SL.9-12.1b**

21. Create an anti-bullying campaign.