

Story of an Off-Brand Band Teacher's Guide

DISCUSSION ETIQUETTE

Creating a safe space for group discussion is always important, especially when it involves potentially sensitive issues such as the ones in this play. If your class or school have agreed-upon rules for discussion groups, please review them with your class prior to beginning. If not, please consider these standard ground rules:

- Respect what others say without passing judgment. It is all right to disagree with another's opinions, but respect must be maintained at all times.
- All things said within the group should remain **confidential**. An environment where hypothetical situations are not treated as confessions should be created and respected.
- Only those students who feel comfortable speaking should be asked to do so. Silence should be respected without judgment.
- Students should have the freedom to explore their opinions and to change them at whim. The process is to allow the students to find, rather than be instilled with, a set of values.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Breakdown of Characters

SAM – Show producer (doubles as STICKS-Drummer in Preamble)

MAGGIE – Production Assistant (doubles as THUMP-Bassist in Preamble)

VOKES – Lead singer in Preamble

BLANK – Guitarist in Preamble

KEYS – Keyboardist in Preamble (doubles as THE HISTORIAN)

Setting

The stage is set with all of the band's equipment in place except the guitar section. It is three hours until the start of the show and Sam (the producer) is checking on the venue with Maggie (his assistant) before the band arrives.

Play Summary

This is the story of a traveling band that plays shows across the country. In every city, the Producer inexplicably neglects to set up the guitar section even though the contract stipulates that that's a requirement for booking and managing this band. The guitarist is left to question the sincerity of the producer as well as the compassion of his/her bandmates - leaving everyone to wonder if the band can just play on.

Martin Luther King

This play has as its centerpiece a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech from 1963. The excerpt quoted by the play is:

In a sense we have come to our Nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our great republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given its colored people a bad check, a check that has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice.

For the entire speech, see [here](#).

For an article on interpreting this speech in a modern context, see [here](#).

Writer's Note

The Story of An Off Brand Band is a metaphor that dances on the notion that America is essentially a great idea with a top-notch brand & slogan (the American Dream) that is captured in the lines and in the spirit of the Constitution. Unfortunately, throughout the years of our history, we have seen that brand and its ideals thwarted, distorted and twisted in pursuit of economic sustainability and dominance. The country stays committed to putting on a good & big show while continuing to do disservice to many of its citizens. At times the original great idea (upon which our entire legal system stands) is unrecognizable all the while, the show goes on. But at what cost and who pays for it?

Learn more about playwright Michelle Lang-Raymond [here](#).

PREPARING FOR THE PLAY

In order to prepare your students for the performance, please remind them about theatre etiquette. This includes:

- Please don't talk during the performance. It is distracting to the performers and other audience members.
- Please try to keep non-verbal noise to a minimum. Unwrapping hard candy, popping gum, and electronic noises steal focus from what is happening on stage.
- It's okay to laugh if something strikes you as funny. It's also okay to cry if something makes you sad. These are examples of appropriate responses. However, whistling at the actors, shouting comments and catcalling are considered inappropriate responses.
- Live theatre is different from film and television because it is based on a relationship between the actors and the audience. Therefore, each performance of the same play is very unique because it is heavily influenced by the responses and interest of the audience. The best thing an audience member can do is to listen and get involved in the story.

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

1. What is bullying behavior?
2. Is bullying a problem at our school? Why do you think people bully others?
3. Is excluding someone from a group the same thing as bullying? Why or why not?
4. What are some reasons that students (or even adults) might get excluded from certain groups?
5. Have you ever been in a situation where someone is being treated differently from the rest of the group? Have you ever been that person?
6. Is exclusion from a group different if it is for reasons beyond a person's control – reasons like race, religion, or gender? If so, how is that different?
7. If you witness or hear about harassment, bullying, or cyberbullying, what is your typical response? Why? What should it be?
8. What is an ally? What do they do? Is that a role you have played, or wanted to play, before?
9. What is the Preamble to the Constitution? What is its purpose?
10. What does the Preamble suggest about how citizens should treat each other?

Post-Play Discussion Questions

1. What parts of the play did you like the best? Why?
2. Is there any part of this story that you can relate to personally?
3. Can you identify a climax to the play? What was it like to experience that moment as an audience member? What other moments in the play were significant experiences for you as an audience member?
4. The band has a moment of levity and laughter about which section of the band is the most important. Do you think they were trying to laugh away the problems they were having? Is that a useful tool?
5. Since this happens in every city, should Blank just assume it will happen and make the necessary adjustments? Should the band make adjustments?
6. Can you understand and respect everyone's position and beliefs in this play? Why or why not? Does the play give two sides to this story or just one?
7. In our performance, two characters change their way of thinking over the course of the play, becoming more sympathetic characters. Playwright Michelle Lang-Raymond saw our performance and was surprised to see that, because in her mind she had written Vokes as a character who was not at all sympathetic. Why do you think our show comes across differently than Lang-Raymond's conception of it? What is your sense of how the play treats Vokes?
8. Do you think this is a play about bullying?
9. What do you think happens next in the lives of these characters?
10. Do you think harassment and bullying are just part of being a teenager? What about being an adult?
11. You have the power to choose how you treat people. What are some ways in which individuals are misusing that power in our world today?
12. If everyone you knew was asked how you treat others, what would you most like them to say?
13. Why is the band called The Preamble?

Further Questions?

If you have questions about the play, the talkback, or how to address these issues with your class, please reach out to Jeremy Ehrlich, Education and Outreach Manager at Taproot Theatre, at (206) 529-3674 or jeremy@taproottheatre.org.

Additional Resources

The following resources aid the prevention of bullying, harassment, violence, or suicide:

Committee for Children's Second Step Violence Prevention Program: www.cfchildren.org/programs/ssp/ms

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: www.clemson.edu/olweus

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: www.save.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK

Crisis Clinic: www.crisisclinic.org

*Teen Link – staffed by trained teen volunteers: www.crisisclinic.org/youth.htm or 206.461.4922 or
1.866.TEENLINK*

For Teachers Only

Handling Bullying Reporting with Students

From Committee for Children's *Second Step* curriculum

www.cfchildren.org

Following performances of our shows, schools often experience an increase in bullying reporting as students become aware that bullying is not acceptable and help is available. Administrators, counselors, and teachers are all seen by students as responsible adults who can help in a bullying situation.

Every school has their own process for handling bullying reporting. The following guidelines are used by permission of Committee for Children. They are taken directly from the *Second Step* curriculum and are intended to supplement (not replace) existing curriculum and guidelines already used in your school.

Handling Bullying Reports

The Four-A Response Process

Because *Steps to Respect* is a schoolwide program, it is essential that all staff know how to respond to bullying reports. Following is the process adults should use when a student reports bullying.

1. **Affirm the child's feelings.**

Ideas:

- a. "You were right to report/get help from an adult."
- b. "I'm glad you asked for help with this."

2. **Ask questions.**

Ideas:

- a. "Tell me more about what happened."
- b. "Has this happened before?"
- c. "Did anyone try to help you?"
- d. "Are you telling me this to get someone in trouble or to keep someone safe?"

3. **Assess the child's safety.**

Determine what the child needs to feel safe now.

4. **Act.**

Coach the child or refer the child for coaching.

Tell the child what will happen next.

Coaching Students Involved in Bullying Situations

Second Step Coaching Models

Once bullying has been reported, both the student who was bullied and the student who did the bullying must receive coaching—it is essential that no exceptions to this rule occur. *Second Step* recommends that all classroom teachers be prepared to coach students. The following sections detail the models teachers should use when coaching students.

Coaching the Student Who Was Bullied

Children rarely report the bullying they experience to adults—in part because they believe that adults are unable or unlikely to stop the harassment. Adults can combat children's feelings of helplessness by (1) affirming children's actions in reporting (which demonstrates that adults will provide the needed support and consequences) and (2) checking back with students who report bullying to see whether the problem has stopped.

Second Step recommends the following five-step model when coaching a child who has been bullied.

1. **Affirm the child's feelings.**
 - a. "You were right to report/get help from an adult."
2. **Ask questions.**

Get information about the current situation and the history of the situation
3. **Identify what has and has not worked in the past.**
4. **Generate solutions for the future.**

Ideas:

 - a. Discuss how the child can avoid the student who has bullied him or her. (Examples: The child could sit somewhere else, play somewhere else, or travel with a group of friends.)
 - b. Coach the student in using assertive refusal skills. (If relevant to the situation, remind the student that aggression is *never* an appropriate solution.)
 - c. Identify others (parents, teachers, friends) who can support the child
5. **Follow up.**
 - a. See how the plan is working.
 - b. Contact parents as appropriate.
 - c. Refer more serious or chronic cases to an administrator or counselor.

Coaching the Student Who Bullied

Your school's bullying policy should provide the necessary framework for applying consequences for student bullying. In addition to those consequences, children who bully need more targeted help addressing their problem behavior. Children are more likely to change problem behavior if adults help them select positive alternative behaviors and provide consistent feedback on their progress.

This coaching model (for use with students who bully) has five steps.

1. **Identify the problem and diffuse reporting responsibility.**

Ideas:

 - a. "I have been hearing that..."
 - b. Many students have reported that..."
2. **Ask questions and gather information.**

Ideas:

 - a. "I'd like to hear from you about what happened."
 - b. "How would you feel if this happened to you?"
3. **Apply consequences.**

Ideas:

 - a. Review the school policy regarding bullying.
4. **Generate solutions for the future.**

Ideas:

 - a. "What are some ways to prevent this happening again?"
5. **Follow up.**

Ideas:

 - a. See how the plan is working.
 - b. Contact parents as appropriate.
 - c. Refer students for further discipline as appropriate.
 - d. Refer more serious or chronic cases to an administrator or counselor.

Note: Be sure to coach the students who have been bullied separately from those who bullied them. Children who have been bullied are often frightened, and may deny that there is any problem when face-to-face with children who have repeatedly harassed them.