From the Editor

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Preventing Bullying Behaviors

How many students, right now, are afraid to go to school? How many young people could not sleep last night because they were so anxious about how they would be treated today? How many teens are crying right now because they can’t open their email or read a text without being attacked? How many children are so tortured and feel so alone that they are contemplating doing something unthinkable to themselves or to others? How many of these students are in your class?

When I decided to produce an issue focused on bullying, I knew we needed a guest editor who was tough, sensitive, smart, and experienced. If you know Nancy Mack, you know we found the perfect person for the job. Nancy has assembled excellent articles from a variety of perspectives that will inform readers about bullying, some of its causes and consequences, and what English teachers can do to help prevent bullies from bullying, keep victims from feeling helpless, and encourage bystanders to actively engage in prevention.

NCTE’s “Resolution on Confronting Bullying and Harassment,” which was approved in 2011 at the Annual Convention, appears on page 16. Offering a rationale and a list of actions for confronting the kinds of abuse that have become far too common in schools, this resolution is an important reminder and resource.

Nancy Mack’s “EJ in Focus” is a deeply personal and informative discussion of “Emotional Literacy” and why teachers should count feelings and human conduct among the topics they include in English language arts. We’re also fortunate to publish advice from well-known experts on bullying and ELA, including Roxanne Henkin, sj Miller, and C. J. Bott (who participates in an engaging exchange with young adult author A.S. King).

Other articles suggest class discussion topics and writing assignments that encourage reflection on bullying behavior, including Maureen Connolly and Vicky Giouroukakis’s assignment on writing letters about cyberbullying, a task they align to the new Common Core State Standards, and Cheryl H. Almeda’s lesson on using a classroom magazine to highlight students’ cultural differences in positive ways.

Readers will also find reference to a host of literary works that raise issues of bullying in the visceral yet sheltered manner that fiction allows; books discussed include K. L. Going’s King of the Screwups (Harcourt, 2009), A.S. King’s Everybody Sees the Ants (Little, 2011), and Jay Asher’s Thirteen Reasons Why (Razorbill, 2007). Nonfiction is discussed as well, including Melba Pattillo Beals’s Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High School (Simon, 1994) and Megan Kelly Hall and Carrie Jones’s anthology, Dear Bully: 70 Authors Tell Their Stories (Harper, 2011).

The issue’s cover deserves special mention. We brought back Arizona artist Michael Schieffer, who designed the cover for the “Beyond Grammar” issue (March 2011); that cover was inspired by Mark Twain’s famous lightning-bug quote. For this issue, Mike took key terms from Guest Editor Nancy Mack’s “EJ in Focus” and formed them into a hand signaling “Stop.” The hand is a versatile tool: the same hand that punches can also give someone a pat on the back or help someone up. As Nancy points out, we’re all capable of bullying, but we’re also all capable of stopping the cycle of bullying.

I want to thank Guest Editor Nancy Mack and all the authors in this issue for what I am confident you will find an engaging and truly valuable resource for confronting and preventing bullying behaviors.

Ken Lindblom has taught English and writing at Columbia High School (East Greenbush, New York), Syracuse University, and Illinois State University, and he is now associate professor of English and director of English teacher education at Stony Brook University (SUNY). He has been editor of English Journal since 2008.