Background
Consistent with NCTE’s commitment to establishing and maintaining equitable school practices, this resolution builds on the 2010 NCTE Resolution on Social Justice in Literacy Education (http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/socialjustice)—in particular, the efforts to support teaching about “social injustice and discrimination in all its forms.”

Bullying can be defined as any repeated behavior that is intended to harm a targeted individual who has less power than the perpetrator. Bullying exists around the world. Research began in the 1970s in Scandinavia. In 1983, following the non-related suicide deaths of three teen boys, all victims of severe bullying, Norway’s Minister of Education launched a nationwide campaign to deal with bullying. In 1999, the Columbine shootings in Colorado brought heightened public awareness of bullying to the US. Since Columbine, hundreds of thousands of instances of school bullying have been documented. In 2001 bullycide was introduced to the world. Legislators and the public have expressed alarm and demanded action, and the education profession has responded proactively. However, despite these demands for action and the steps taken, bullying continues to be a very serious problem. As individuals committed to social justice advocacy, our responsibility is to prevent and actively respond to bullying.

“As educators, our purpose is to help our students learn, but our first responsibility is to provide a safe learning environment” (More Bullies in More Books, C.J. Bott, 2008). Many staff members may not feel prepared adequately to respond to bullying incidents. Although 47 states have adopted anti-bullying legislation, high-stakes testing and strict curricular mandates may cause educators to be wary of using classroom time to teach something that may be considered outside the scope of the curriculum. Additionally, educators have faced personal and professional consequences for taking a stance against bullying during the school day, especially when the bullying results from a topic that is considered “taboo” (e.g., students’ sexuality, sexual identity, religion, etc.). Despite these risks, educators’ responsibility to advocate for their students’ safety and well-being is absolute.

By reading, writing, and thinking about bullying, we offer students “the thousands of ethical conversations” they need to develop into strong, literate adults. Additionally, new forms of bullying, such as cyberbullying and sexting, compound and amplify the scope of traditional bullying because they occur in digital contexts, where texts, images, and video are circulated instantly to a larger audience. Through literature and writing, “...we can help students develop a rich array of strategies” to deal with bullying (Confronting Bullying: Literacy as a Tool for Character Education, Roxanne Henkin, 2005). These include teaching traditional texts like The Ugly Duckling and contemporary classics like The Misfits. This can be complemented by the use of a wide range of non-traditional and digital media, thereby using critical literacies to deconstruct these multi-modal texts.

As English teachers, we are in a unique position to use discourse as a way of helping students explore and understand bullying in all its forms and to shape their own values and attitudes toward...
it, even as they deepen their understanding of language effect and affect in the world. Be it therefore

Resolution

Resolved that the National Council of Teachers of English urge

• all teachers to cultivate classrooms that are safe environments where students can learn free from fear;
• all school staff as well as students to take the appropriate action when they witness bullying in any of its forms;
• English language arts educators (K–12) to explore the thousands of books and digital and multi-modal sources containing the theme of bullying and harassment and to use these sources in their classrooms to discuss and confront bullying;
• English language arts educators to use their unique roles as teachers of discourse to engage students in speaking and writing about bullying, including articulating their experiences and clarifying their values;
• teacher educators to provide professional development opportunities that help teachers foster a respectful, empathetic, and socially-just classroom, thereby enabling all students to reach their full potential; and
• continued advocacy for teachers who integrate prevention measures into their curriculum, often at significant personal and professional risk.

An NCTE Position Statement is a statement on an education issue that is approved by the NCTE Board of Directors or the NCTE Executive Committee. This statement was approved at the 2011 Annual Business Meeting in Chicago, Illinois, and can be found online at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/confrontingbullying.