

DEAR BULLY

70 Authors Tell Their Stories

edited by **MEGAN KELLEY HALL** and **CARRIE JONES**

Discussion Guide

About the Book

After the bullycide of Phoebe Prince on January 14, 2010, Megan Kelly Hall and Carrie Jones created a Facebook group called Young Adult Authors Against Bullying. The word spread, and soon authors and educators were connecting. That began the process for the book you are holding in your hands.

Seventy authors have used their words to tell their stories about bullying. Your story may be here, or maybe it is waiting for you to tell it.

Twenty-six Letters

Bullying always starts with words. Whispered behind someone's back. Shouted from a group of people—from strangers and even friends. An anonymous note tossed onto a desk during class. Lines written on the bathroom wall, on the board behind the teacher for everyone else to see. On the outside of a locker. Under a photograph in the yearbook.

Words are an amazing force. They can bring us together or push us apart. Words can make us feel powerful or render us powerless. Words are our first tool to comfort others and our first weapon to hurt. They are our tools of love and our tools of hate. Words are learned early, and they can inspire or bruise forever.

Many of the stories in *Dear Bully* focus on the danger and strength of words, and also in their comfort. Marina Cohen writes:

"I didn't have the words then—but I have them now. So I say to you and all others like you:

My self-worth is not linked to your cruel words and actions.

My self-esteem is not affected by your deliberate attempts to destroy my character.

You have no power over me.

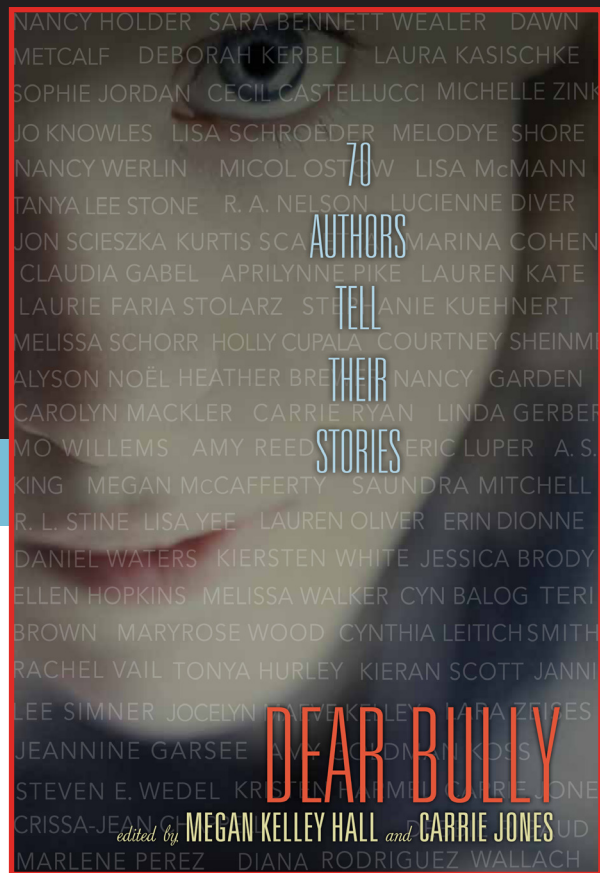
You will not silence me.

These words are not constructed of ink and paper. They are not formed of movement and sound.

They are echoes of my soul. May they ripple outward and give strength to those who hear them."

Who would have thought that combinations of twenty-six letters that can generate love, caring, support, and knowledge can also cause so much pain, humiliation, and violence? But they do.

We are all judged by the words we use. How will the world judge your words?



DEAR BULLY

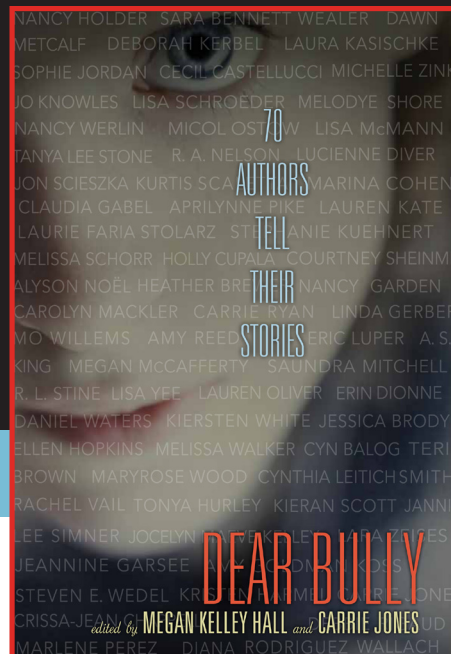
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Discussion Questions and Topics for Reflection

1. *Stand up to the bully. Walk away from the bully. Ignore the bully's words. Invisibility is the best defense.* Do you think these words of advice are helpful? Describe a time you witnessed these words work or not work. What do you think are the best methods to use to deal with a bullying situation?
2. Lara Zeises uses the term "equal-opportunity offender" (p. 223). What does she mean by this? How do we become equal-opportunity defenders?
3. Melissa Walker believes "Bullies have foot soldiers. And those people can turn into bullies themselves" (p. 144). Define foot soldier in this case. Are you one? How do you know that you aren't?
4. Ellen Hopkins says, "Not only do many Americans tolerate bullying, they stand in the wings and cheer it on" (p. 3). Do you agree? Can you think of an example (or several examples) of this happening in daily life? Why do you think we allow such a thing to happen?
5. Do you believe our society allows and/or supports the discrimination and harassment of certain groups of people? Why do you think such targeted harassment of a particular group is allowed, condoned, and even validated? Have you ever participated in such harassment? Have you ever been its target?
6. Why do some people equate being different to being wrong? Do you think it can be difficult to be an individual? What makes it that way?
7. Some people believe that bullying makes a person stronger, but it can also make a person take his or her own life. How can people have such completely different reactions to being bullied? How else might a person react to bullying?
8. Jon Scieszka writes about the "terrifying power of the fifth-grade boy brain: the ability to not even think about how your actions might affect others" (p. 39). Every one of us is judged by our words and actions. Do you have things you wish you had never said or done? If you do, make a list, and then think about how those behaviors or words have influenced how other people see you.
9. "Bruises on the soul hurt even more than bruises on the leg and take longer to heal" (Rachel Vail, p. 48). Do you agree? How long do you think it takes to heal from a bully's words? For the target? For the bully? For those who observe? How does a bully's behavior change him/herself? How does being bullied change the target as a person?
10. When it comes to bullying, anyone can be the abuser, and anyone can be the target. If someone harasses you, it has more to do with the harasser than it does with you. You may simply be the next person to walk through the door. How can you help that person who walks through the door? We are all witnesses, and we cannot stay silent. Think about ways to act and speak out. In the words of Cyn Balog, "Kindness is never, ever the wrong choice" (p. 255).



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Discussion Questions and Topics for Reflection (cont.)

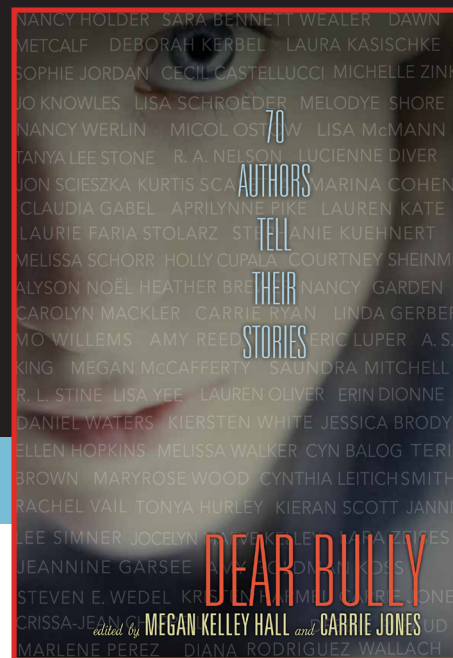
11. On a piece of paper, make three columns. In the first column, write your thoughts about how it might feel to be a target of bullying; in the second column, fill in your thoughts on the feelings of a bully; in the third, record your thoughts about the feelings of a bystander/witness. Share your thoughts with someone you trust. If you need inspiration, here are some insights from *Dear Bully*:

- "What gave you the confidence to roll into middle school that first day of fifth grade and take over?"
—Kieran Scott, p. 30
- "How do you tell your mother you've become a target, a loser, a failure, a lunchtime joke?"
—Deborah Kerbel, p. 122
- "Being a bully is easy, and being a victim is all too common. But standing on your safe middle ground and deciding to reach out where you can make a difference? That is a rare and difficult choice. Make the choice. Do something. Never shut up. I wish I had."
—Kiersten White, p. 150
- "After a few minutes of tormenting Carol, I felt a sort of peace as my heart calmed back down and the sweat on my hands tingled and evaporated."
—Amy Goldman Koss, p. 146
- "My shame is having ever joined in the abuse."
—Kurtis Scaletta, p. 220
- "'I am worth something because somebody stuck up for me. What you and Rhonda did—that kind of saved my life.'"
—Debbie Rigaud, p. 184
- "There are thousands of bullying incidents every day. Every single bullying victim hurts. Some kill themselves. Those who survive bear hidden scars forever."
—Nancy Garden, p. 273

About the Editors

MEGAN KELLEY HALL is the author of the young adult novels *Sisters of Misery* and *The Lost Sister* and has written for a variety of publications, including *Elle*, *Glamour*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Boston Herald*. She lives north of Boston. You can visit her online at www.megankelleyhall.blogspot.com.

CARRIE JONES is the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of the *Need* series—which includes *Need*, *Captive*, and *Entice*—as well as *Girl, Hero*; *Love (and Other Uses for Duct Tape)*; and *Tips on Having a Gay (ex) Boyfriend*. She lives in Maine. You can visit her online at www.carriejonesbooks.com.



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