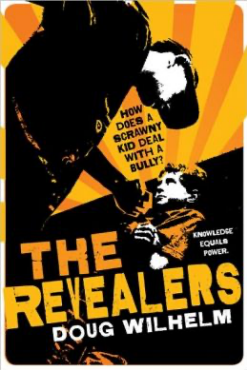


Discussion Guide for Grades 6–8

The Revealers

Summary



Seventh-grader Russell describes Parkland Middle School (known by its student body as “Darkland”) as “an obstacle course of kids alert for someone they can pound on or ridicule.” Tired of the bullying that they experience on a daily basis, Russell and two classmates—Elliot and Catalina—start an unofficial e-mail forum at school in which they publicize their experiences. When other students write in with similar stories, it becomes clear that the problem at their school is bigger than anyone knew. *The Revealers* (as the forum is known) sparks awareness and begins to make a positive change in the school atmosphere, but just when the tide seems to be turning for the better, an act of revenge by a few students still bent on bullying others threatens the underground rebellion that has the whole school talking. This suspenseful story of computer-era underground rebellion offers fresh perspectives on some of the most enduring themes in fiction for young readers.

The Revealers © 2003 by Doug Wilhelm
Jacket art © 2003 by Michael S. Wertz
2011, 240 pages, Grades 5-9, Square Fish

Requirements

➔ [The Revealers](#)

A Conversation with the Author

[Read “The Story Behind *The Revealers*” and a Q&A with author, Doug Wilhelm.](#)

Prompts for Writing and Discussion

Click on one of the following themes of bullying and bias. In each theme, the quotes or passages from *The Revealers* can be used for small or large group discussion, or to guide reflective writing. In most instances, the quotes or passages are followed by suggested questions to help guide you. All page numbers refer to the first edition (hard cover) of *The Revealers*.

- [Feeling like an outsider/the importance of “fitting in”](#)
- [Cliques, social hierarchies, and cruelty in middle school](#)
- [Assumption that bullying is natural or normal](#)
- [Different types of bullying](#)
- [Impact of exclusion and bullying](#)
- [Bystander behavior](#)
- [Copying with bullying](#)
- [Making your personal experiences public](#)
- [Strategies for responding to and stopping bullying](#)

Theme: Feeling like an outsider/the importance of “fitting in”

“...when seventh grade started I found out I was out. It was like everyone else took a secret summer course in how to act, what to say, and what groups to be in, and I never found out about it.” (Page 3)

Vocabulary

Assumption
Brutalize
Clique
Compassionate
Courageous
Dominate
Establishment
Exclude
Harass/Harassment
Humiliate
Impunity
Infraction
Innovative/Innovator
Isolated/Isolation
Mock
Persecuted
Predator
Ridicule
Sarcastic
Strategy
Stature
Stereotype
Target
Tormentor
Victimize
Vulnerable

"I wanted people to say, "Hey, Russell! Sit with us!" But I'd open my mouth and what would come out would be loud and clanky and wrong. And they would give me that quick, flat, puzzled stare that is the stock weapon of the cool seventh grader and seems to ask, "What species are you, exactly?" And I would go away thinking I was hopeless." (Page 3)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- Russell describes feeling "out" and "hopeless." Do you think he is the only seventh grader who feels this way? What feelings and experiences might Russell have in common with his peers?
- What makes you feel awkward sometimes? What triggers the "stare" in your school that Russell talks about and that seems to ask, "What species are you?"

Russell: *[To his mom about Elliot and Catalina]* The thing is, they're kind of nerdy.

Mom: Why do you say that? Aren't they just people?...What makes someone nerdy? I never got that.

Russell: ...People just know they don't fit in.

Mom: Well, how important is fitting in? I mean, really? (Page 40)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- What motivates us to put people into boxes such as "nerdy," "cool," "in," or "out"? How do such categories impact us?
- Have you ever made someone feel "out" in your efforts to feel a part of the group?
- What would it take to break down the social "pecking order" that exists at your school so that no one would feel that they "don't fit in"?

Theme: Cliques, social hierarchies, and cruelty in middle school

"Middle school...was basically a place you tried to survive...Everybody was rushing around and you hardly knew anybody, and there were predators. Even some of the kids you knew started turning into them. Plus, a lot of kids at our school were changing and making these tight little cliques, and if you didn't fit in somewhere you could be in trouble." (Page 9)

"...the whole place is an obstacle course of kids alert for someone they can pound on or ridicule. If you have no hope of being accepted in a cool clique, or any clique for that matter, you're safest if you can manage not to get noticed at all." (Page 10)

"You know how there's always one kid in school who's the dirty one, one kid who's the smelly one, one kid who throws the ball over the backstop...and one kid who it's okay for anybody, absolutely anybody, to trash? In our school that last kid was Elliot...I wasn't really sure why he was the one, but the fact was that in Parkland School seventh grade, no matter who you were, Elliot Gekewicz was lower on the social scale than you." (Page 17)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- Russell describes middle school as a place with "predators" that you "try to survive." Can you relate to his experience? How was your transition to middle school similar or different?
- Why do you think fitting in to "tight cliques" or groups is important to people? What types of people are considered "cool" at your school?
- Why are some people singled out for "ridicule" at school? What changes in your school community would help to lessen cliquish and "predatory" behavior?

Theme: Assumption that bullying is natural or normal

"...people assume these sorts of incidents are a fact of life at your age. We tend to say, 'Oh, well, kids will be kids.' It's almost like we assume that cruelty and violence are part of growing up. I wonder why we assume that?" (Page 108)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- Do you think that teasing and bullying are just a "fact of life" that must be tolerated, or is it possible to do away with

this type of behavior?

- What would it take to change people's assumptions about bullying and to make compassion rather than cruelty the norm?

Theme: Different types of bullying

"For some reason, sometimes when you are new or different in some way, people decide to tell lies about you. I don't know why...I'm somebody people have been telling untrue things about." (Page 63)

"Girls at this age can be really vicious, and so vulnerable. I almost think it's more serious business than you boys with your physical stuff." (Page 67)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- People often think of bullying as physical harassment, but telling lies and spreading rumors can also be bullying. What other forms does bullying take? Which are most problematic at your school?
- Do you think one form of bullying is worse than another? What do all types have in common?

Theme: Impact of exclusion and bullying

"The new girl stood up. People started whispering. "I am from near Manila. In the Philippines," she said, and sat down. The whispers turned into giggling." (Page 27)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- How must it have felt for Catalina to be laughed at and whispered about on her first day in a new school?
- What motivates people to treat those who are different as outsiders?
- What would it take at your school to make those who are new or different feel welcome?

"...not getting noticed was all I wanted, starting the day I got singled out by Richie to be the new target of his personal psychological terror campaign...When I woke in the morning I didn't want to get up...By the time I walked into school, my stomach was caving in...I didn't want to turn around. I didn't want to be alone and I didn't want to be in crowds either...I started getting stomachaches every morning and bad headaches...every afternoon. I didn't tell anybody." (Pages 10-12)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- What does it feel like to be the target of bullying? How does it affect you physically and emotionally?
- When harassment is not just a one-time incident, but a daily occurrence, how does it take control of your whole life and impact your ability to do school work, make friends, participate in activities, etc.?

Theme: Bystander behavior

"I had known Elliot since we were in kindergarten, and I had seen a lot of stuff happen to him. I never really joined in, but I never tried to stop it either, not that I could have." (Page 17)

"...everyone knows about feeling alone...If a few people persecute somebody, most of us pretend it isn't happening, right? We don't want to see it." (Pages 85-86)

"I think people ought to realize that stuff like this goes on every day...The rest of you are all part of it-because you let it go on and maybe you think it's funny, or you think it only happens to geeky outsiders and kids who are smaller or fatter or skinnier or don't have so many friends or so much money as you. So tell me-what happens when you don't have so many friends one day, or you don't have so much money, or something bad happens to you?" (Pages 91-92)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- Why do you think Russell watched Elliot get bullied for years, but never did anything to help? What causes us to “not see” bullying or to “pretend it isn’t happening”?
- Are those who don’t get involved partly responsible for bullying even though they are just bystanders?
- What do you think prevents students at your school from standing up for others? What would it take to create an atmosphere of support?

[After a nasty note is delivered to Catalina] “Come on,’ I said...’Do you like to see people getting treated...like you get treated?...let’s just go talk to her.” (Page 31)

“...We came looking for you ‘cause we think it sucks...We’re duckbills, too...We’re kind of like the plant eaters in a swamp of killer reptiles...” (Page 36)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- What motivated Russell and Elliot to reach out to Catalina?
- Have you ever shown support to a peer who has been ridiculed or bullied? Why or why not?

Theme: Coping with bullying

“I used to think it meant something bad about me, that she acts that way. Now I think a person like that just needs someone to plot against. She needs enemies. But really, so what? The whole world is not Parkland School.” (Page 128)

“I used to feel so all alone because of this guy, like I could never be okay or have any friends again. Then when I started reading *The Revealer* I realized that this stuff happened to a lot of kids in my grade (sixth). We had a discussion in English about it, and I made friends with two other kids. Now we stick together, and because we are together the troublemakers do not give us much trouble anymore.” (Page 157)

Theme: Making your personal experiences public

The following quotes reflect each character’s initial feelings about making students’ personal experiences of bullying public through an internet forum.

Elliot: “So why shouldn’t we help other people broadcast what’s happened to them? Maybe they won’t be so scared anymore either.” (Page 102)

Russell: “It’s like one of those trashy daytime talk shows...maybe we could make people famous for five minutes because they’re victims. Everybody could read their stories and say, Whoa, their lives are pathetic! And then what? Either these kids get their arms and legs ripped off because they’ve told on somebody, or a few kids feel sorry for them and everyone else just laughs.” (Page 102-103)

Catalina: “It’s funny, but ever since we sent out my story, people have been treating me differently. It’s like they see me now. Before I was...invisible. I didn’t mean anything to anybody.” (Page 103)

Leah: “...Lots of kids didn’t know these things were going on...I think this is going to make a big difference...If people can’t do rotten things in secret anymore, they probably won’t do them...you’re changing the atmosphere...middle school kids won’t do things if they’re not cool to do. Right?” (Page 139)

Russell’s Mom: “People need to tell their stories. Don’t you think? We don’t always get the chance. And here you’re giving it to them.” (Page 177)

Questions for Writing or Discussion

- Which of the perspectives above do you most agree with? Why?

- Elliot and Catalina point out that making their stories public can make others feel less afraid and invisible. Russell worries that such sharing could bring pity, retribution, or ridicule. Do you think the benefits of being open outweigh the risks? Why or why not?
- How do you think a public forum for people to share their personal stories would go over in your school? Would you participate in such a forum? Why or why not?

Theme: Strategies for responding to and stopping bullying

Each of the following quotes or excerpts from *The Revealers* reflects a strategy for responding to or stopping bullying. Which strategies do you think would be most or least effective in your school? Which ones can you envision trying? What other positive responses to bullying can you think of? Consider the following questions as you reflect on the passages below:

- Do you think that bringing incidents of bullying into the open and talking about them candidly would help to reduce the problem?
- Do you think that confronting or standing up to those who bully is something that most students could do? Would it help if they could?
- When should adults be told about incidents of bullying and turned to for help?
- How can keeping a diary or journal be a useful strategy for those who are bullied?
- How can those who are bullied find support among their peers?
- What can you do to be an ally to those who are picked on?

“Our hypothesis is that bringing bullying and harassment incidents to light among the whole student body in a school will result in these incidents happening less often, and being less severe.” (Page 194)

[Discussing survival strategies for smaller, weaker dinosaurs] “[they] traveled in herds, mostly. They’d keep the young, small, and weak ones in the middle...I had this sudden mental picture of a whole bunch of kids-skinny kids, little kids, gawky kids, fat kids, kids with funny hair, kids with thick glasses, kids who trip over cracks in the sidewalk. They were trooping through the halls together, all wearing white T-shirts that said: NERD HERD.” (Page 25)

Russell: “I keep trying to walk a different way home, but he always finds me when he wants to. I just wish I knew why. Why does he pick on me?”

Catalina: “Why don’t you ask him?”

Elliot: “Yeah! Like a scientist. Maybe you can figure him out.” (Page 38)

Mom: “That boy’s got a lot more problems than you do. And one of them’s about to be me.

Russell: Mom...Don’t call. Don’t do anything...It’ll just make a mess...Everybody’s going to know about this...And if my mom comes in yelling or does whatever...”

Mom: “I’m sorry...I’m not doing nothing. If one adult did this to another, he’d be in jail. Why should it be different for kids?...A kid like that is going to keep on doing the same things...unless someone calls him on it...I’m going to call the principal...I just think she should know.” (Pages 45–46)

[After Elliot convinces Russell to write down what happened to him] “I didn’t really feel like it...but I...looked at the screen and started to type...It felt kind of good, writing that, I [thought] the next day.” (Pages 47–48)

“Casually they surrounded him. Blanchette slapped him hard on the shoulder; Elliot stumbled and Blanchette grinned...Elliot reached in his jacket pocket and pulled something out...The three Rots were just standing there looking when Elliot swung this thing overhand, and it came down and smacked Burke on the forehead.” (Page 56)

“...I stood up to ‘em...They might think twice before harassing me again.” (Page 80)

“Stand up to people, you get respect.” (Page 99)

Extension Activities

See the extension activities that follow for ideas on ways to increase awareness about bullying using *The Revealers*.

The Revealers Extension Activities

Follow up your reading of *The Revealers* with one or more of the extension activities below, which can help to increase awareness about bullying.

Administer a Bullying Survey

In *The Revealers*, three students who are the targets of frequent bullying administer a bullying survey to the student community to learn more about their peers' experiences. They find that 67% of the students at their school have been involved in a bullying incident, that 48% have been involved in more than five incidents, and 23% in more than ten incidents. Work with your students to administer a survey in your school and compare the results to the fictional data compiled by the characters in the story. The results of your survey can be used to stimulate classroom discussion, and can also be made public in order to raise awareness and generate some solutions to the problems that are identified.

Create an Online Forum

The Revealers underscores the power of digital media to reduce isolation and foster communication. Work with your students to create a moderated online discussion or blog about their experiences with bullying, exclusion and social hierarchies at school. While it is important to create an uncensored, student directed space, it is recommended that clear guidelines be set for using the forum and that an adult be involved in monitoring the postings and ensuring a safe web environment.

Sponsor a "Community Read"

Research shows that increased teacher and parent involvement is an important part of efforts to reduce bullying. One way to increase awareness and foster involvement is to organize a "community read," in which students, staff and families are invited to read *The Revealers* together and then attend a community event to discuss the issues raised in the story and identify ways that they can work collaboratively to reduce bullying in their community.

A Conversation with the Author of *The Revealers*

Doug Wilhelm

The Story Behind *The Revealers*

*There are three stories of where *The Revealers* comes from and how it was made. They connect.*

First, I was a very geeky seventh grader. I was tall, skinny, and awkward. Like Russell in the book, when I started seventh grade in a big new school, I found that I didn't fit in anywhere, and that everything I said-everything!-seemed to come out wrong.

Then one day I said something stupidly wise to an especially scary eighth grader. He kicked one wheel of my bike, one afternoon when I walked it past him downtown. I said, "Oh gee thanks-the spokes were out of line. I think you fixed them."

Like Russell in the story, I rode away thinking maybe that wasn't so smart. And the next time this boy saw me, in a store downtown, he took me outside and punched me in the stomach.

*The opening scene in *The Revealers* draws closely on that experience. The bully in my life didn't start to stalk and terrorize me, as Richie does to Russell in the book-but I remembered very clearly how it felt to be as scared of someone as Russell becomes.*

The second story behind the book involves my son, Bradley. Brad is now a strong, tall football and basketball player in high school. But when he was in second grade, one day he told me that he and two friends had a secret laboratory in their school, where they would lure bullies and dissect their brains. Brad and his friends wanted to know why certain kids picked on other kids, and if they could find a way to get them to stop.

*Brad's story was partly fiction and partly true-no kids' brains were missing that year, but he and his friends really were trying to figure the bullies out. This gave me the idea for *The Revealers*.*

To research the book, I talked to middle schoolers at several schools in Vermont, where I live, to learn their experiences of bullying and harassment and how they felt about them. I visited several classes. I explained that I was working on a story about bullying, then asked the kids to each write me the story of one true experience they had had-whether as a bully, a receiver of bullying, or an observer. Almost every kid had at least one story to tell. Then I worked with those kids and their stories, to help them improve their stories as pieces of writing. I came away with a pile of true stories, in middle schoolers' own words.

I didn't use any of those true stories in my book, but I did read them closely. I drew on them for ideas, for a better understanding of the various ways that kids (especially girls) bully, and for impressions of how kids might write about their experiences. I also talked with teachers, principals, and assistant principals about bullying and similar behaviors in their schools.

From these three sources of experiences, ideas, and inspiration, I developed my novel. And that's the story behind the story.

Q&A with Doug Wilhelm

Where did the characters in your book come from? Are they real people?

Russell

Russell's first experience with the bully, Richie, is based on something that happened to me, when I was in seventh grade. In some ways, Russell is like I was, then. He's bright but he says awkward things that can be funny but definitely are not cool. He means well but doesn't fit in, and he doesn't have many friends. I was like that.

But Russell is not like me in other ways-mainly in how he reaches out to two other seventh graders, Elliot and Catalina, who are also isolated and friendless. I didn't do that. I wish I had. When kids today ask me how they can deal with being bullied, I

often encourage them to find a friend. Find someone you can hang out with, and talk with. The most vulnerable kids, I think, are the ones who-like Russell, at first-are the most alone.

Elliot

Elliot is also like I was, in some ways. He's also bright, yet he's someone whom it's okay for anyone else in his school to pick on and humiliate. He gets lost in an interest-in his case, dinosaurs-that sort of replaces reality, for him. I was somewhat like that, especially with reading. In middle school, I read all the time. I probably exaggerated this in thinking up Elliot. Elliot is not like I was in that he's small, quick, and birdlike, while I was tall, skinny, and awkward. I'm sure other people I've known influenced my ideas about Elliot, but I'm not sure who they were!

Catalina

Catalina is not based on any specific person, but she has a quality of quiet strength that I have seen and admired in many women I have known. When things get really hard, and the boys are ready to give up, Catalina doesn't let them. She's shy and aloof, in this new school where some people are treating her in a confusing way-but inside, behind that, she's very strong.

Richie

I have been surprised to find that for many young readers, Richie is their favorite character in *The Revealers*. He's certainly the most complicated! People ask me why Richie acts the way he does. I can only say: read the story carefully, and draw your own conclusions. There are clues! But I think that, as a reader, you deserve to have your own relationship with a book, and your own understanding of each character.

I was bullied by more than one boy, in my middle-school years, and I think that in making up Richie, I remembered some of the ways those boys acted. But, again, he's not based on any one person. I just had a sense of him as someone who can only relate to other people by being violent, or by threatening to be violent. Why is he that way? What do you think?

Bethany

As the ruler of the clique of cool girls who torment Catalina, Bethany is based on a number of powerful middle school girls I have observed. I try to watch the way middle schoolers act, the way they establish themselves. Some are powerful, and it's interesting to watch the ways they try to keep and use and protect that power. So Bethany is a character based on my observations.

The Jock Rots

Everyone has known boys in school who are great at sports, or otherwise cool and popular, and who seem to enjoy making life miserable for less popular kids. They seem to do it for fun. I think Jon Blanchette, in the group that Elliot calls the Jock Rots, is like that. I definitely knew real boys like Jon!

As for Burke Brown, he's darker, more angry. Who knows why some people are angry? They may have their reasons, in their lives, but we don't always know what those reasons are. That's how Burke is to me. Basically, I think these boys are cruel to certain kids, like Elliot, not because they're mean by nature but because their kind of cruelty is tolerated in "Darkland" Middle School. They think it's cool.

Big Chris, who is with the Jock Rots at first but then turns against them, grew as a character in the rewriting of the story. At first he was more someone in the background-but my editor at Farrar, Straus & Giroux thought he was interesting and should be developed more. As I worked to do that, Big Chris became more interesting to me, too. Along with a couple of other "supporting characters" in the book-Jake and Allison-I really came to like Big Chris. To me, he's a follower who discovers his conscience and decides to stand up for what he feels is right. I think that decision probably changes Big Chris's life. What do you think?

Why did you focus on the topic of bullying in your book?

Partly because I had an idea for a story that I liked, which involved some kids trying to investigate why the bullies in their lives act the way they do.

Also, I was bullied pretty severely when I was in middle school, and I never forgot how that felt. I remembered being so scared

to go to school in the morning, and then even more scared to come out of school at the end. I remembered the feeling in my stomach, and getting headaches every afternoon-as Russell does in *The Revealers*. I remembered feeling so isolated, because at that time in my life, I was.

I survived that time, and became a very tall grownup and a professional writer, but I always remembered those experiences, and how they made me feel. When I started working on *The Revealers*, I drew on those memories. I don't think you can write a novel to solve anyone else's problems, or to tell them what to do-but I do think you can hope to write a story that connects with other people, and that might help them feel that they're not alone.

Most kids who are harassed feel isolated, but Russell, Elliot, and Catalina find strength in coming together, pursuing a "scientific approach," and ultimately, creating "The Darkland Revealer"—their e-mail bulletin. How did you conceive of this?

Being bullied can be so isolating. For me as a middle schooler, it was like living in darkness. I thought the idea of three kids taking a scientific approach to investigating the bullies in their lives could become a tale about coming out of that darkness, and about shining a light on what goes on inside so many young people's lives.

It took me a while to develop that idea into the whole novel. How did I get the notion of the kids in the book using their school's new computer network to tell the truth? Well... I knew that Dartmouth College, where I do some work as a writer, has a computer network that links up every student and faculty member. They were among the first colleges to develop a network like that. I also visited a school in Vermont that has a local area network, and saw how people used it. I was observing how often kids today use e-mail and instant messaging to communicate-and in my own work as a professional writer, I was often sending and receiving files attached to e-mail messages.

I just put those things together, and the story unfolded as I worked on it. I never have a book all mapped-out when I start.... I like to discover what's going to happen as I go along from day to day.

I wanted the kids in *The Revealers* to be using their minds and their creativity to change their situations of being bullied. As my story grew, I started to see how they could not just change their own situations-they could actually try to change the culture, the atmosphere, in their whole school. "Darkland" School starts as a place where bullying is tolerated, excused and ignored. What Russell, Elliot and Catalina do opens people's eyes to the kinds of damage that bullying can do, and how widespread it really is in their school. Again, I thought of this as taking something that has been hidden in darkness, and shining a bright light on it.

So to me, *The Revealers* isn't just about bullying or violence... it's about what can happen if you bring something out of darkness, into the light.

What did you notice about the roles of parents and teachers in dealing with this problem? In the book, even well-meaning parents and teachers seem to be unable to help, and Mrs. Capelli is in denial.

A lot of that came from my reading of books and articles about bullying. Research has shown that, while bullying happens pretty much everywhere, it tends to be at its worst in schools where the people in charge don't do much about it, make excuses when it happens, and try to ignore it whenever they can.

Is Mrs. Capelli, the principal who doesn't want to know about the problem in her school, a realistic character? I certainly don't mean that all principals, teachers or parents try to deny or ignore bullying. There are many, many adults, like the teacher Ms. Hogeboom and Russell's mom in the story, who see what happens and feel deeply about it, though they often don't know how to help or make a difference.

But I also learned that one of the biggest "bullying problems" is that so many grownups who could make a difference pretend, instead, that this stuff isn't happening or that it doesn't really matter. So I think Mrs. Capelli is realistic. A national expert on bullying recently told me that, in his experience, there are all too many Mrs. Capellis in our schools, even today.

In general, whether the adults in *The Revealers* are well-meaning or in denial, there is a communication gap between them and the kids. When the teachers or Russell's mom talk, the kids may hear them, but they're almost never directly listening...and sometimes, as in Ms. Hogeboom's social studies class, the kids are talking on a level that the adult doesn't even know exists. That came through naturally, as I wrote the story, and I think it is natural.

I would especially point to the scene, in the big-crisis part of the story, where Mr. Dallas, who runs the school computer network, thanks Russell for talking things over with him—yet Russell hasn't said a word! It was just Mr. Dallas talking, then thinking he and Russell had had a conversation. I think if we adults want to understand and help kids who are going through bullying, or any other problem in their lives, we have to start by asking them questions and really listening to what they say. Much too often, we think we've had a good conversation with a young person when it's really just been us talking at them.

I include myself in this! I do it, too. My son would certainly tell you so!

Bullying is an issue every generation faces. What is unique about this generation? Are larger world issues having an impact?

That's a great question that is hard to answer. I'm no psychologist, but I think kids basically bully for one of two reasons: because inside themselves they're scared, or just for the hell of it, because it's tolerated by adults and they think it's admired by other kids. The kids who are scared may feel that way because of something that's going on in their home or their family, or because this is a complex and often scary world to grow up in. I think these are especially frightening times for kids. There's a lot of violence and sense of threat that kids experience, read about and/or see on TV. In many ways it's hard to feel safe.

It's really important, again, that we try our best to pay attention to the young people in our lives. Anyone who feels listened to, and feels there is someone they can trust and talk to, is less likely to hurt other people as an escape from his or her own fear.

The kids who torment or humiliate other kids just because they think it's fun, like the Jock Rots in the story, tend to do this when they know it's tolerated, or they even feel it's encouraged—they believe it makes them cool. Again, I think the more we shine a light on behaviors like bullying, so that everyone sees what they really are, the less tolerated and accepted they will be. There's always going to be a certain amount of casual cruelty in the world. The key thing is to resist letting it become organized, accepted cruelty.

People are more and more aware that bullying isn't just a harmless phase of growing up. Grown-up bullies seem to be everywhere, these days... and a strikingly large portion of young people who've been involved in school shootings, like the Columbine killers, were severely bullied in their schools. I personally think awareness—just paying attention—is the most important thing. People are paying a lot more attention to bullying these days—and as someone who was bullied growing up, I hope this new attention will help a lot of kids feel less alone.

I hope *The Revealers* will do that, too. When I hear that it has, I feel tremendously gratified by that.

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