

The Language of

# Trauma and Loss

## Teacher Guide



[www.pbs4549.org/trauma](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma)



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# Credits

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## SOURCES

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# Overview

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## Purpose

*The Language of Trauma and Loss* has a dual purpose:

- To use the **standards of language arts** to help students who may have experienced stressful events
- To help teachers understand how to deal with these stressful situations and to determine what their role is in working with the affected children

## Contents

**Video One** is a professional development video that explains the effect of trauma and loss on brain development and the role of the teacher in developing a “safe” classroom. Dr. Bruce D. Perry, provincial medical director in Childrens Mental Health for the Alberta Mental Health Board and senior fellow of the ChildTrauma Academy, offers his expertise. Dr. Perry then speaks about how teachers can use this video and other information about the topic.

**Video Two** contains the story *Bridgett Bunny’s Ordinary Day That Wasn’t* and is directed at elementary school students. The story involves an unidentified sad and scary thing that happens to Bridgett. Dr. Perry then speaks about how teachers can use this video and other information about the topic.

**Video Three** features Erica, who has had a startling behavior change and reveals a sad experience. The students look at the language arts of the story and then Dr. Perry talks to middle school students about trauma and loss.

In **Video Four**, Erica has been sent to the office for being belligerent. This leads to a discussion of why these behaviors occur. Dr. Perry then speaks about how teachers can use this video and other information about the topic.

An extensive **teacher guide** is included in the package. Part 1 is reference material that includes information about the brain, the causes of trauma and loss and ways to create a safe school environment. Part 2 includes lesson plans for elementary, middle school and high school students.

An extensive Web site is also available at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma).

# How to Use *The Language of Trauma and Loss*

It is our hope that teachers using this program make sure that their classroom is a **safe place for children** so that students can communicate experiences in their lives. Teachers are not expected to be guidance counselors. Rather it is hoped that they will, through these activities, have a better understanding of why behaviors occur and, in turn, know when they should make a referral to a counselor or an appropriate authority.

Listed below are descriptions of the videos and correlating stories. The stories also can be found on the Web at [www.pbs4549.org](http://www.pbs4549.org). While we encourage teachers to adapt these lessons to suit their own needs, we offer below the Curriculum Committee's intended use of the programs.

1. First, teachers will watch **Video One**. It explains the effect of trauma and loss on brain development and the role of the teacher in developing a "safe" classroom. Dr. Bruce Perry, a leader in this field, offers his expertise.
2. There are three videos and correlating stories, each of which is designed for specific grade levels. The teacher has the option to either show the video or read the story first. At the end of each video, Perry discusses important areas of concern for teachers and students.
  - a. **Video Two, Elementary – *Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary Day That Wasn't*** tells about a bunny that has always been happy but suddenly becomes quiet and withdrawn because a sad and scary thing has happened to her. She meets Mr. Owl, who listens to her and helps her understand what has happened. The students are never told what the sad and scary thing is. This allows students to think about their own experiences while listening to the story.
  - b. **Video Three, Middle School – *The Story of Erica*** tells about a pleasant girl who moved away and then came back as a very different person. After some time, she reveals her problem to the class.
  - c. **Video Four, High School – *Erica's List*** features an older Erica who has been sent to the office for being belligerent. This leads to a discussion of why these behaviors occur, with an emphasis on stimulus-response reactions.
3. After the students have watched the video and/or read the book, the teacher (either on the video or live) will ask the standard questions about the story to determine students' levels of understanding. These questions focus on plot, character, setting, problem and solution.
4. For each grade level, the teacher guide offers language arts lesson plans that are keyed to the story and that match state standards. These plans can also be used as a model with other stories.
5. Self-healing activities can be found in the teacher guide and on the Web site. These include activities that allow students faced with trauma or loss to reestablish a feeling of safety and some degree of control over their surroundings.
6. The teacher guide and Web site offer a section called Literature Connection that contains an annotated list of books for classroom use. The Web page also contains Web links to lesson plans and activities for many of the books.

Using the context of language arts standards, *The Language of Trauma and Loss* strives to help teachers understand the importance of providing a safe environment, both physically and emotionally, for students. It also gives teachers and students a better understanding about why some behaviors occur. While teachers are not expected to be counselors, it is hoped that this program will help them identify children whose behavior shows that they may need professional help.

The Language of

# Trauma and Loss

## Reference Materials

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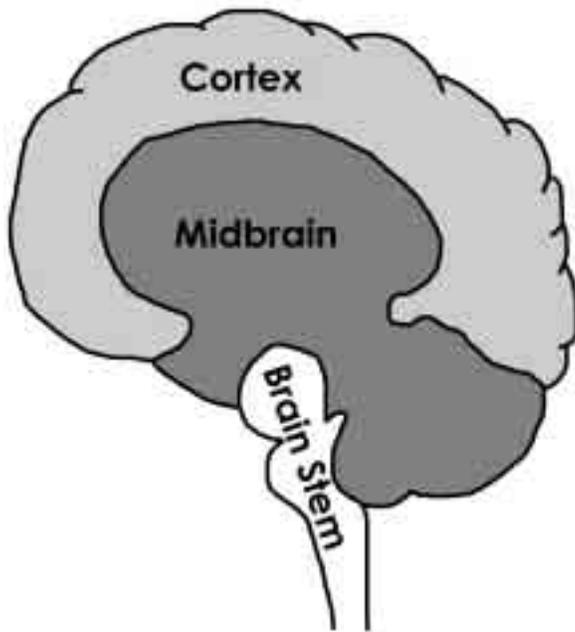
# Why Study the Brain?

What does the brain have to do with the study of trauma and loss? In a word, everything!

**“Experience can change the mature brain — but experience during the critical periods of early childhood organizes brain systems.”**

— *Dr. Bruce D. Perry*

There are three parts of the brain: the brainstem, midbrain and cortex. Each has its own purpose. The brainstem deals with the essential or survival functions while the midbrain deals with feelings and emotions. The cortex controls the functions of language and problem solving and also holds the capacity for learning. For learning to take place, a child must be functioning with the cortex part of the brain.



When a traumatic incident occurs in a child's life, the brain is fundamentally changed and the response to the trauma is imprinted. So if the child responds to the trauma with aggression, he will tend to be aggressive whenever an event triggers a reaction. If the child withdraws, that behavior is also patterned.

Under times of stress, the midbrain reacts fastest and therefore learning cannot take place. If the child is functioning in the brainstem, he or she may exhibit survival reactions such as freezing or fleeing. If the child is functioning in the midbrain, he or she may be unable to concentrate, remember, pay attention, think clearly or make sense of what people are saying. Learning takes place in the cortex, and this is only possible when the child is not in an aroused or anxious state.

## Facts About the Brain

- The brain weighs about three pounds and looks like a gray, unshelled walnut
- A person is born with over 100 billion brain cells, which are called nerve cells or neurons
- Changes in the neurons allow for storage of "information"
- More brain cells are not developed after birth
- Brain cells that are not used wither away
- The brain can send signals to the other cells in the body at a speed of more than 200 mph
- Learning peaks between 3 and 10 years of age, but continues throughout life
- Systems of the brain interact and are interconnected. The hierarchy goes from the most complex (cortex) to the least complex (the brainstem)
- Different states of arousal (calm, fear, etc.) activate different neural systems
- Different parts of the brain deal with different functions
- Brain development is predictable
- Life shapes the brain's development
- Periods of "vulnerability" are times when the brain is more sensitive to both positive and negative stimulation
- The brain remains sensitive throughout life
- The cortex is more plastic or changeable than the brainstem

# The Effect of Trauma

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When the brain perceives a threat, it responds based on biological and/or psychological systems. The two major responses to threat are **dissociation**, also known as freeze and surrender, and **hyperarousal**, also known as fight or flight.

When the brain activates these systems, there are changes in its development and organization. These changes affect the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social and physiological behavior of the child. The actual response of each individual to threat varies tremendously.

## Dissociation

According to Dr. Bruce Perry, **dissociation** is “the mental mechanism by which one withdraws attention from the outside world and focuses on the inner world.” It is a primary adaptive response that all children and most adults use. The level of dissociation depends upon the intensity or duration of the threatening situation. Low levels of dissociation can include daydreaming or gazing off into nowhere.

## Hyperarousal

This response involves removing yourself either physically, psychologically or aggressively from a threat, or trying to flee from the situation.

## Reminders of the Original Event

People are often faced with reminders of the original trauma that cause pain and anxiety. They may act stunned or numb, gaze off into nowhere or seem unfocused, evasive or unclear when answering a question. These responses occur because they are trying to dissociate from the original trauma. The more prolonged the trauma, the more pronounced the long-term chronic and potentially permanent changes in the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and physiological functioning of the child.

Children who make it through traumatic events and have a low level of fear are often impulsive, hypervigilant, hyperactive, withdrawn or depressed. They may also have sleep difficulties and anxiety.

# Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience of, or witnessing of, life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping and feel detached or estranged. The symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person's daily life.

According to the National Center for PTSD, some factors that may affect children and adolescents include the following. The list is not all-inclusive; other factors may affect specific children.

- Natural or man-made disasters
- Violent crimes such as kidnapping, rape or murder
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Severe burns
- Community violence
- War
- Peer suicide
- Sexual or physical abuse

## The Prevalence of PTSD in Children

Fifteen to 43 percent of girls and 14 to 43 percent of boys have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. Of those children, 3 to 15 percent of girls and 1 to 6 percent of boys could be diagnosed with PTSD.

Rates are higher for children in an at-risk situation. Jessica Hamblin, Ph.D, of the National Center for PTSD, states that studies have shown that as many as 100 percent of children who witness a parental homicide or sexual assault develop PTSD. Further, 90 percent of sexually abused children, 77 percent of children exposed to a school shooting and 35 percent of urban youth exposed to community violence develop PTSD.

## Characteristics of PTSD

Dr. Hamblin suggests that children affected by PTSD exhibit the following characteristics:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger and hostility
- Aggression
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Self-destructive behavior
- Feelings of isolation and stigma
- Poor self-esteem
- Difficulty in trusting others
- Substance abuse
- Social avoidance
- School failure
- Regressed or delayed development
- Distractability and attention problems

In extreme cases, a number of psychiatric disorders occur, such as separation anxiety, panic disorder, anxiety disorder, deficit/hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder.

Researchers are finding that PTSD may present itself differently in children than adults. It may be difficult to identify symptoms in very young children, but they may report more generalized fears such as stranger or separation anxiety. They may also reenact the trauma during their play. Other symptoms may include sleep disturbance and the loss of acquired skills such as toilet training.

Children of elementary school age tend to experience "time skew" or the mis-sequencing of trauma-related events. They may reenact the trauma in play, drawings or verbalizations. Adolescents sometimes incorporate traumatic reenactments into their daily lives, and they are more likely than younger children or adults to exhibit impulsive and aggressive behaviors.

## PTSD Vulnerability in Children

Why are some children affected with PTSD while others who witness the same or similar events have lesser no or problems? Three factors related to risk are apparent:

- The age of the child
- The characteristics of the event
- The characteristics of the family and social system

# The Teacher's Role

You may find yourself thinking, "I'm not a counselor! This is not my job!" That is understandable. Teachers are not expected to be counselors, but they do have children who have been affected by trauma or loss in their classrooms. It is helpful to recognize that a problem may exist and to know what to do about it.

## Creating an Emotionally Safe Classroom

Just as you strive to have a physically safe classroom where children don't get hurt, you should also provide an emotionally safe classroom. If a child does not feel safe in the classroom, then chances are good that learning will not happen.

It is relatively easy to determine if a classroom is physically safe. Is it sufficiently warm in the winter? Are sharp objects kept away from children? But it's not as easy to determine the emotional safety of a classroom. Edward de Bono, a leading authority in the field of creative thinking, stresses the importance of emotional safety in the classroom on his Web site, [www.edwdebono.com](http://www.edwdebono.com). An emotionally safe classroom includes these aspects:

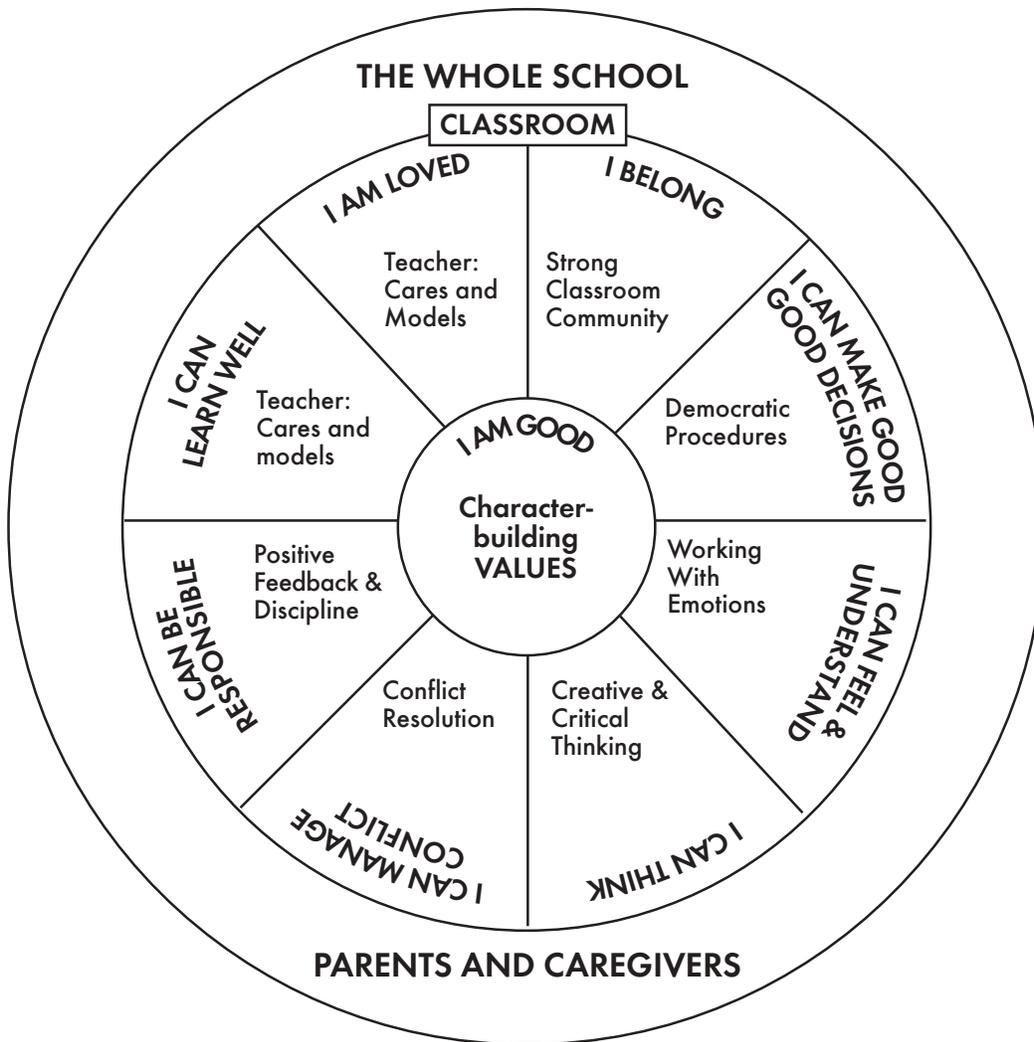
- **Belonging** – The teacher sets standards that require the compliance of students. For example, the rule that one person speaks at a time gives value to what the student says and teaches good manners as well.
- **Achieving** – The students must have the possibility of meeting the academic expectations that you set for them.
- **Consistency** – The teacher explains the expectations for the class and consistently applies them.
- **Meaning** – Students need to see a personal meaning in their class work. This helps them to feel connected and safe.
- **Acting as a role model** – If the teacher can help a child see how to negotiate the traps and obstacles of life, the child will feel safer.

## Creating Places of Emotional Safety: Another Viewpoint

Beryl Lourens, an educational consultant specializing in emotional literacy, describes her work to create emotionally safe places for children. She uses the "I Can" model, which encourages a classroom climate where children are valued, supported and affirmed. Briefly, the model states:

- **I am good** – The foundation for an emotionally safe classroom is good values – structures, procedures and strategies that promote character-building on a daily basis.
- **I am loved** – Teachers model good values at all times, respecting themselves and the children and, in turn, expecting them to do the same.
- **I belong** – Values such as respect and compassion contribute to the development of a strong classroom community.
- **I can make good decisions** – The use of democratic procedures gives children the opportunity to be involved in some decision-making.
- **I can feel and understand** – Teachers use strategies to help children identify and talk about their emotions.
- **I can think** – Children gain confidence in their ability to solve everyday problems through the teaching and practice of creative and critical thinking skills.
- **I can manage conflict** – Children are taught conflict resolution strategies.
- **I can learn well** – Teachers recognize and use methods that are appropriate for children with different learning styles and multiple intelligences.
- **Whole school** – Not only should the classroom be safe, but also the entire school should offer a caring atmosphere.
- **Parents and caregivers** – Parents and caregivers are the primary educator of the child. Schools need to reach out to parents whenever possible and encourage them to support the values encouraged in the school setting.

This diagram shows the “I Can” philosophy.



### Creating Places of Emotional Safety: A Third Model

Nina Kucyk, a trauma and loss counselor at Mercy Medical Center in Canton, Ohio, states, “The need for safety – physical, emotional and psychological – is so basic and important that unless met, higher-level needs, such as belonging, wanting to succeed, etc., become extremely difficult to achieve.” Kucyk sees the learning environment as a place where students experience the following:

- Feel a sense of belonging
- Have permission to make mistakes
- Have permission to forget
- Are encouraged
- Are valued for their unique skills and talents
- Have the ability to make choices
- Are free from judgment
- Are respected for their physical appearance and academic, athletic, creative and social capabilities
- Have the freedom to have and to express their own feelings and opinions without fear of recrimination

# Questions About Trauma

## What Is Trauma?

A trauma may be *any* event that an individual has directly or indirectly experienced or perceived as instilling a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, fear, hopelessness and/or a loss of safety, whether physical or emotional. Traumatized children often exhibit symptoms similar to attention deficient hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder or bi-polar disorder.

Two experts in the field of trauma counseling offer these additional descriptions:

- Beverly James (1989) defines trauma as “overwhelming, uncontrollable experiences that psychologically impact victims by creating the feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, loss of safety and loss of control”
- Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. (2001), states that trauma is a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experiences

## What Might Cause Trauma in Children?

Following are some of the more common causes of trauma in children. Details about each are given in this chapter.

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Parental depression
- Moving
- Placements (foster care, group home, residential)
- Loss of a loved one (person, pet, etc.)
- A school climate perceived as unsafe
- Lack of friends or support/self-esteem issues

## What Do Traumatized Children Think About Their Behavior?

Children generally feel bad about behavior that is antisocial. They often feel guilt, shame and blame and see themselves as the problem. Their focus is on survival rather than being a victim. They don't want to lose their sense of control. Basically, they are functioning from a state of hyperarousal.

## Do Traumatized Children Choose to Behave as They Do?

The misperception regarding traumatized children who are labeled as such is that they choose their behavior because of their anger and mistrust. Based on neurological research, traumatized children do not choose their behavior; rather, whenever they perceive their sense of safety as being threatened, they automatically react with a “fight, flight or freeze” response.

## What Are Indications of Trauma?

A teacher may observe the following actions that could indicate trauma in a child:

- The student who routinely asks to go to the office or see the school nurse because he or she “doesn't feel well” (somatic complaints, fatigue)
- The student who often goes unnoticed in class (avoidance, helplessness)
- The student whom you are certain eats a lot of sugar and drinks caffeinated soda before coming to school (hyperactivity)
- The student who is either sleeping or daydreaming (fatigue, “zoning,” inattention)
- The student who is thought of as a loner or perhaps a bully (isolation, aggression)
- In students who are perfectionists, there is fear of having to try new tasks (hopelessness)
- The student who has difficulty keeping or maintaining friendships (poor social skills, poor attachments, heightened irritability)

# Common Causes of Trauma in Children: Physical or Sexual Abuse

## Physical Abuse

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, "It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of children are physically abused each year by a parent or close relative." Often the emotional trauma remains long after the physical bruises are gone. Children who complain of abuse should be taken seriously. They may display one or more of the following symptoms:

- A poor self image
- Sexual acting out
- Inability to trust or love others
- Aggressive, disruptive and sometimes illegal behavior
- Anger and rage
- Self-destructive or self-abusive behavior; suicidal thoughts
- Passive, withdrawn or clingy behavior
- Fear of entering into new relationships or activities
- Anxiety and fears
- School problems or failure
- Feelings of sadness or other symptoms of depression
- Flashbacks and/or nightmares
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sleep problems

Sometimes symptoms of child abuse do not manifest until the adolescent years. Without proper treatment, physically abused children may feel the effects of the abuse throughout their entire life. Physical abuse is not the only type of abuse. Neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or any combination thereof can also be devastating to the healthy growth of a child.

## Sexual Abuse

About 80,000 cases of child sexual abuse are reported each year, but in reality, the number is far greater as much abuse goes unreported. "Sexual abuse includes fondling a child's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and commercial exploitation through prostitution or production of pornographic material," according to FOCUS Adolescent Services.

Sexual abuse can occur within the family or outside of the home. When abuse occurs within the family, children may feel anger over what is happening and

experience confusion over feelings such as love, jealousy or shame. Sexually abused children may exhibit the following behaviors:

- Unusual interest in or avoidance of things of a sexual nature
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Depression or withdrawal
- Seductiveness
- Eating disorders
- Self-injury
- Refusal to go to school
- Delinquency
- Conduct problems
- Secretiveness
- Running away
- Unusual aggressiveness
- Suicide

## The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

Nancy Faulkner, Ph.D., a child advocate and health care consultant, has a Web site with detailed statistics on child sexual abuse ([www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats.htm#Impact](http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats.htm#Impact)). Some of statistics are listed below:

- It is estimated that 60 million survivors of child abuse are in America today
- About 31 percent of women in prison state that they had been abused a child
- About 95 percent of teenage prostitutes have been sexually abused
- Children with disabilities are four to 10 times more vulnerable to sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers
- Early identification of victims is crucial to the reduction of suffering
- Adolescents with a history of sexual abuse are more likely to be at risk for HIV because of the behaviors they may engage in.
- Young girls who have experienced sexual abuse are three times more likely to develop psychiatric disorders or abuse alcohol and drugs in adulthood than girls who were not sexually abused
- Among both boys and girls, adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to have eating disorders

# Common Causes of Trauma in Children: Neglect/Inadequate Bonding

## Bonding

Bonding is a process that leads to an emotional connection or attachment. Dr. Bruce Perry states, "Without predictable, responsive, nurturing and sensory-enriched caregiving, the infant's potential for normal bonding and attachments will be unrealized. The brain systems responsible for healthy emotional relationships will not develop in an optimal way without the right kinds of experiences at the right times in life."

## Factors Affecting Bonding and Attachment

It has been found that there are many factors that can influence the ability of children to bond with parents, caregivers or even peers. Some of these factors include the following:

- **Infant** – The child's temperament or personality will affect bonding. If the child is irritable or there is a medical problem like a birth defect or illness, there will be more difficulty achieving bonding than with a self-soothing, healthy child.
- **Caregiver** – Critical, rejecting and interfering parents tend to have children who have difficulty bonding. Causes may include maternal depression, substance abuse, personal difficulties or poor health.
- **Environment** – Fear caused by the environment can lead to difficult bonding. Pervasive threats, chaotic environments, domestic violence, community violence or war zones are detriments to bonding.
- **Fit** – The "fit" between the temperament of the mother and the child is crucial.

## Children With Bonding Problems

Factors seen in children with bonding problems vary depending upon the nature, intensity, duration and time of the neglect or abuse.

- **Developmental delays** – These can be physical, emotional or cognitive.
- **Eating** – Odd habits such as hoarding or hiding food may persist. Sometimes severe problems like throwing up food or difficulty swallowing appear later in life.
- **Soothing behaviors** – The child exhibits excessive behaviors including, rocking, chanting,

scratching, biting or cutting themselves. The child may also purposely bang his or her head.

- **Emotional functioning** – Depression and anxiety symptoms are common.
- **Inappropriate modeling** – Girls who have been sexually abused tend to model inappropriate behavior. Boys who have been sexually abused may become abusers.
- **Aggression** – The two primary problems are lack of empathy and poor impulse control.

## The Teacher's Role

In some instances when a child has bonding difficulties because of neglect, the teacher can play a critical part in helping the child become more emotionally strong. Dr. Perry states that the following areas are critical in helping the child become better able to exhibit bonding behavior and overcome the difficulties connected with neglect. Following are some strategies for teachers to help a child with bonding difficulties:

- Nurture
- Try to understand behaviors
- Parent these children based on emotional age
- Be consistent, predictable and repetitive
- Model and teach appropriate social behaviors
- Listen and talk with these children
- Have realistic expectations
- Be patient with the child's progress and with yourself
- Take care of yourself
- Take advantage of other resources

## *Common Causes of Trauma in Children:* **Parental Depression**

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A study by R. C. Kessler that was printed in the *International Review of Psychiatry* revealed that about 13 percent of adults of reproductive age experience clinical depression each year. He noted that the rates are even higher for parents who are the primary caretaker, have children under age 3, have low income, are a minority, are adolescent parents or have more than one child.

It has been shown that when parents are depressed, their children are affected and the younger the child is, the greater the impact will be. Children of depressed parents run a higher risk of being depressed themselves. They also run a higher risk of problems with bonding, physical health, academic performance, peers, self-esteem, attention deficit, aggressive behavior and language delays. This is also where we see children who assume the role of the parent.

The following messages should be sent to children who are in homes with parents exhibiting depression:

- The depression is not your fault
- You can't fix it and you are not responsible for taking care of your parent
- You are not alone. There are other adults around who love you and will help you
- It's okay to have feelings about this
- It's okay to ask for help

## *Common Causes of Trauma in Children:* **Moving**

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One in five American families moves each year. Moving can be one of the most stress-inducing experiences a child (and an adult for that matter) can face. Studies have shown that children who move frequently are more likely to have problems at school. Moving interrupts friendships and changes schedules and school curriculums.

Kindergarteners and first graders often have difficulty with moving because they are also experiencing their first separation from parents.

The older the child is, the more difficult moving becomes because of the closeness that older children have with their peer group. Parents should watch for signs of depression, changes in appetite, social withdrawal, a drop in grades, changes in mood and sleep disturbance.

Here are tips that teachers can give parents who are preparing to move:

- Explain why the move is necessary
- Look at maps and photos and read about the new location
- After arriving at the new location, get the children involved in activities such as swimming, scouting, etc.
- Let the children help with packing
- Encourage the children to collect addresses or e-mail addresses so that they can keep in contact with their friends
- Encourage open discussions about the move

## *Common Causes of Trauma in Children:* **Placements (Foster Care, Group Home, Residential)**

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Eleanor Willemsen, professor of psychology at Santa Clara University, wrote, "Intimate relationships with others are the context in which we discover who we are, learn how others feel about life's important issues and find out how to bridge differences. The emotional security and warmth derived from an initial close relationship with a loving parent provides us with a 'home base' from which we can venture to take the risks that are inevitably part of a life of joy and accomplishment. In short, close, psychologically intimate relationships between babies and their caregivers are central to human life."

The question then becomes, "What happens to the individual who has these intimate relationships disrupted?" Below is some interesting information about placement options.

- Jean-Marie Ferdion from the Institut National d'études Démographiques has found that in the United States, 34 percent of homeless young adults between the ages of 20 to 24 and 61 percent of those aged 18 to 19 were in foster care at some time in their lives. She further found that the risk for young people being placed in foster care is related to the social level and poverty of the family of origin. Also, she found that "a childhood environment (natural or foster family) characterized by little emotional warmth and support or by strict discipline produces lower levels of self-esteem among adolescents."
- Lee Doran and Lucy Berliner, in a study of innovative practices and in a literature review, found that multiple placements (as compared to a sustained placement) are associated with worse outcomes for children.
- Lale Drost, in a research report, "Problems Faced by Adolescents in Group Homes," found that problem-solving skills, such as getting advice, solving problems directly and turning to family or other adults for help, have been found to be higher in adolescents in foster families than in group home housing arrangements. He further found that group homes provide shelter for those in need, but they cannot take the place of foster parental guidance, grandparents or other family members who are willing to look after the child, nor can they replace independence for older adolescents who demonstrate the ability to take care of themselves.

# Common Causes of Trauma in Children: Loss of a Loved One

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The occurrences of their family moving or parents separating are losses for children, but the most devastating loss is that of death. Children have fewer skills to help them adjust to this loss; therefore, they are more vulnerable. When the death is sudden and unexpected, there is little time to begin adjusting. If the death is anticipated, children have time to slowly reshape relationships, making the loss painful but easier to deal with.

The closer the relationship of the deceased is to the child, the more intense the loss will be felt. The emotions felt by the child should not be underestimated. If this is the case, the effects of the loss will persist.

Dr. Bruce Perry states, "Grieving is a process that reshapes our inner world following loss." There are two challenges for the child. First is the actual processing of the event, where questions such as "Can I catch the illness?" could be in the mind of the child. Second is the actual coping with the loss. The primary emotion is fear – of the unknown and of the future. The normal grief process may include these feelings:

- Denial
- Emotional numbing
- Anger, irritability and episodic rage
- Fear
- Confusion
- Difficulty sleeping

- Regressive behaviors
- Physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches
- Changes in appetite

Teachers often serve as a crucial emotional bridge for children at times of loss. Some tips for teachers follow:

- Don't be afraid to talk about death or loss
- Share your own feelings
- Invite children to talk about their feelings regarding the event or death
- Be a good role model in showing children how to express emotions in a healthy way
- Help the other children in the class understand how devastated the child who experienced the loss is
- Make sure children know that this is not a topic for teasing
- Make available the "Kids in Crisis" online discussion group ([www.kidsinacrisis.org](http://www.kidsinacrisis.org))

## Common Causes of Trauma in Children: School Climate

Every child has the right to feel welcomed, safe, respected and motivated to learn in the school environment. This is not always the case. A major stressor for children is a school that is perceived to be unsafe – where a child is bullied, harassed or threatened.

In October 2004, the State Board of Education in Ohio adopted School Climate Guidelines. These guidelines were reviewed by the Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council and have received national and state feedback. Ohio has received national recognition for these efforts.

While many of the guidelines deal with the physical safety of the students, there is significant information about the emotional health needs as well. Guideline #5 states that addressing real and perceived threats to safety and security enables students to focus on learning and teachers to focus on instruction. This includes crisis management team development and

policies and procedures for dealing with conflict. Guideline #6 states that a student’s sense of belonging in the classroom encourages classroom participation, positive interactions and good study habits.

Also given is an Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy, which states that it is the goal of the State Board of Education, through the School Climate Guidelines and this policy, to foster a positive school climate. The Ohio Department of Education offers models and strategies in the following:

- Helping to identify and address issues such as bullying, intimidation and harassment that occur in the school setting
- Disseminating information and providing professional development for teachers
- Designing a plan to evaluate the effect of these policies

Safe school information can be found at [www.ode.state.oh.us/safe\\_schools](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/safe_schools).

## Common Causes of Trauma in Children: Lack of Friends or Support

*Psychology Today* reports, “Friendship is like food. We need it to survive.” Children do need friends to support them as they move away from the family and become more independent. Some children have only one good friend at a time; others have many. Most children learn the skills of friendship in their own time.

A lack of close friends and little social contact generally brings about the emotional discomfort or distress known as loneliness. Everyone is lonely at some time. Chronic loneliness, however, is one of the surest markers in existence for maladjustment.

### Some Findings

Nicki R. Crick and David A. Nelson stated that research has shown that having many friends or having friends who were protective buffered children from the negative effects of peer victimization. Similarly, findings from two additional studies have demonstrated that children with numerous friends are less likely to be victimized than children who lack friends. Hara Marano in *Psychology Today* states that lonely children

report more stress when exposed to the same stressors as non-lonely people. Further, she states that loneliness raises levels of stress hormones and blood pressure, which in turn causes the heart to work harder.

What can parents do to help their child form friendships? Jan Faull, a child development expert, suggests that with younger children, the teacher might pair a lonely child with another child. Sometimes a child who is slightly older or younger works best, because different-aged children accommodate one another more easily. Teachers can suggest that at home, the parents might invite a child over after school or on Saturday afternoon to play. The goal is for the child to begin to see himself or herself as social rather than alone.

# What Parents Need to Know

The National Association of School Psychologists states that how adults express their emotions will influence the reactions of children and youth. Parents and teachers can help children manage their feelings by both modeling healthy coping strategies themselves and by closely monitoring their own emotional state and that of the children in their care.

## Signs of Trauma

The Child Trauma Institute states that children who have experienced some event that has caused them to feel a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, fear, hopelessness or loss of safety may exhibit some of the following behaviors:

- **Sleep disturbance** – They may have bad or scary dreams, talk in their sleep, have trouble getting to sleep or wet the bed.
- **Guilt** – They may blame themselves for the event or for other things that happen, act out in order to be punished or display overly good behavior.
- **Acting younger** – Children may become “clingy,” be unwilling to be left alone, demand attention or start acting immature.
- **Fear** – They may become fearful of things related to the trauma – they may be startled by loud noises, sudden movements or being touched, or be afraid to be near strangers.
- **Fear of their parents’ reactions** – They may feel guilty and worry that their parents blame them.

## The Parent’s Role

According to the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, the parent’s role is very important in helping children and adolescents to recover from trauma-related experiences. It’s not always easy to tell when a child is bothered by trauma, grief or depression because many of these responses seem to be the normal stages of growing up. It is important to give support to the child through open communication and emotional backing:

- Acknowledge the seriousness of what the child has experienced
- Let the child know that it is normal to feel upset
- Reassure the child that he or she is safe
- Maintain a normal routine and spend time with the child
- Encourage the child to talk about what happened and what feelings he or she is experiencing

- Try not to be critical or say things like “get over it” or “stop complaining”
- Reassure the child that it is not his or her fault
- Be consistent
- Seek counseling for a child who continues to have difficulties

## Referrals

When should a parent seek professional help for a child? This is certainly not an easy question. The National Association of School Psychologists states that if any of the following symptoms persist beyond a few weeks, or if any of these symptoms are severe enough to disrupt the usual home or school activities, parents and teachers should seek mental health services:

- Disruption of peer relations
- Behavioral problems
- Decreased performance at school
- Physical complaints with no apparent cause
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Nightmares
- Low self-esteem, negative talk about oneself
- Lack of energy and lack of interest in previous activities

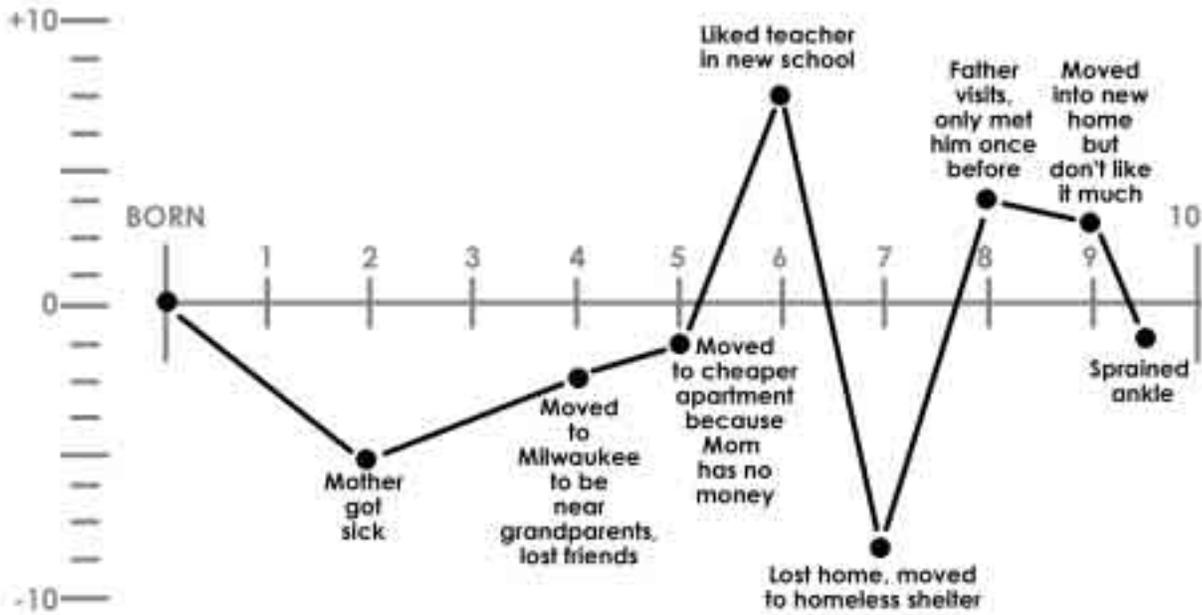
# Self-healing Activities

The activities listed below are summaries of lessons from a book titled *Helping Kids Heal* by Rebecca Carman (The Guidance Channel Company, 1-800-99-YOUTH, [www.GuidanceChannel.com](http://www.GuidanceChannel.com)). They can help the teacher and child to communicate about traumatic events.

## Making a Safe Classroom

- **Safety List** – In this activity, students are asked to make a list of people, places and things that make them feel safe. Encourage students to refer to the list whenever the need arises.
- **Stop** – Students make a little stop sign and put it in a place where they can look at it. When they start to think of their bad memories, they look at the stop sign and it reminds them to stop their current action and think about something pleasant.
- **What Actually Happened?** – Ask the students to draw a picture of what they are afraid of. On the back of the picture record each student's description of the picture. The student can refer to the picture if he or she becomes confused about an incident; it can also be used as a starting point for conversation.
- **Before and After** – Have the students make two columns on a paper and label one "Before" and one "After." They can write how things were before the event in one column and after the event in the other column. (This is generally used for community issues. It may be too "close" for personal issues.)
- **Monster Match** – Have the students draw the scariest monsters they can imagine. Now draw a match for the monster. Brainstorm the characteristics of the "hero" and tell how he will "manage" the monster.
- **Great Things About Me** – Have the children make lists of 50 to 100 great things about themselves. Hang them in the classroom or tape them to their desks so that they can refer to the list when they are feeling low.
- **Circle Time** – Have the children sit in a circle. Give each of them a piece of paper on which they should write their name. They will pass the papers around the room and when the teacher says stop, the person who has the paper will write one nice thing about the student whose name is on the paper. After they finish, have them fold the paper so that the next person will not see what has already been written.
- **Day in the Life** – Using a camera, have the students take a picture of their day. Then ask them to write about the pictures and how they felt at the time they were taking the picture. Compile the pictures and compositions into a booklet.
- **Dream Catcher** – Native American people believe that bad dreams are caught in the web of dream catchers and that good dreams get out through a hole in the middle. The following site offers more information about dream catchers: [www.dream-catchers.org/make-dream-catchers.html](http://www.dream-catchers.org/make-dream-catchers.html).
- **Wonders of the World** – Children lie on a big piece of butcher paper and have a classmate trace around their outlines. Then they draw or write on their own outlines what their eyes will see in the future, where they want their feet to take them, what they like to eat, what they like to listen to and what they would like their hands to make.

- **Timeline** – On notebook paper, have the students draw a thick horizontal line. Ask them to label it beginning at 0 (representing when they were born) and continuing with a mark for each year of life, ending with their current age. To the left of the horizontal line, have them draw a vertical line with positive and negative scales of one to 10 as illustrated below. Then ask them to make a list of significant events that have occurred in their lives, and how old they were for each event. Have them place a dot for each event at the age it occurred. Where the dot should be placed depends on how good (positive scale) or bad (negative scale) of an event it was. Once they are finished, have them connect the dots.



- **Dear Abby** – Take 3-by-5 cards and write questions on them about things that might be of interest to students. Have the students also write questions and include these all in a box. Have the students pick a card a day and then brainstorm to find answers to the questions asked. Assist with misperceptions. Also let them know that there may be some things that have no solutions.
- **What Were They Thinking?** – Find pictures that show some type of emotion or body language. You can use photos from home or from magazines. Have the students write or tell what the person in the picture is thinking.

# Literature Connection

## Elementary Books

The books listed here can be used to enhance or expand the ideas expressed in this series. The Web site for **The Language of Trauma and Loss**, <http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma>, has links to lesson plans, summaries and activities about the secondary books.

## Elementary Books

### Physical or Sexual Abuse

#### Nonfiction

*Family Violence: How to Recognize and Survive It* by Janice E. Rench

*Everything You Need to Know About Sexual Abuse* by Evan Stark, Ph.D., and Marsha Holly, Ph.D.

*What Do You Know About Child Abuse?* by Pete Sanders

*How to Deal With Monsters: A Child's Practical Guide* by Richard Powell, et.al.

#### Fiction

*What Jamie Saw* by Carolyn Coman

*Tadpole* by Ruth White

### Neglect

#### Fiction

*Our Gracie Aunt* by Jacqueline Woodson

*Heck, Superhero* by Martine Leavitt

### Parental Depression and Mental Illness

#### Nonfiction

*Let's Talk About When Your Mom or Dad Is Unhappy* by Diana Star Helmer

#### Fiction

*You Can Call Me Worm* by Dan Haas

*Pictures in the Dark* by Patricia McCord

*So B. It* by Sarah Weeks

*Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry* by Bebe Moore Campbell

### Moving

#### Nonfiction

*Moving* by Janine Amos

*Let's Talk About Moving to a New Place* by Diana Star Helmer

*Moving* by Fred Rogers

#### Picture Books

*Best Friends Together Again* by Alike

*The Leaving Morning* by Angela Johnson

#### Fiction

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Gary D. Schmidt

*Amber Brown Is Green With Envy* by Paula Danziger

### Placements (Foster Care, Group Home, Residential)

#### Nonfiction

*Let's Talk About Foster Homes* by Elizabeth Weitzman

#### Fiction

*The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars

*Pictures of Hollis Woods* by Patricia Reilly Giff

*The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson

*Out of Nowhere: A Novel* by Ouida Sebestyen

*Where I'd Like to Be* by Frances O'Roark Dowell

### Loss of a Loved One

#### Picture Books

*I'll Always Love You* by Hans Wilhelm

*Where Do People Go When They Die?* by Mindy Avra Portnoy

*My Grandfather's House* by Bruce Coville

#### Fiction

*Flip-Flop Girl* by Katherine Paterson

*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson

*Missing May* by Cynthia Rylant

*Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore* by Kathy Stinson

## School Climate

### Nonfiction

*Dealing With Bullies* by Pam Scheunemann  
*Peace on the Playground: Nonviolent Ways of Problem-Solving* by Eileen Lucas

### Picture Books

*My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig  
*The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill  
*Trouble in the Barkers' Class* by Tomie DePaola

### Fiction

*Agnes Parker ... Girl in Progress* by Kathleen O'Dell  
*The Field of the Dogs* by Katherine Paterson  
*Junebug and the Reverend* by Alice Mead  
*Simon's Hook: A Story About Teases and Put-downs* by Karen Gedig Burnett

## Lack of Friends and Self-Esteem Issues

### Picture Books

*The Blue Ribbon Day* by Katie Couric

### Fiction

*Sahara Special* by Esme Raji Codell  
*I, Amber Brown* by Paula Danziger  
*A Rainbow of Friends* by P.K. Hallinan  
*The Loveables in the Kingdom of Self-Esteem* by Diane Loomens  
*The Big What Are Friends For? Storybook* by Sally Grindly and Penny Dann

## General

*The Adventures of Caterpillar Jones* by J.J. Brothers  
*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst  
*Always and Forever* by Alan Durant

*And God Cried, Too: A Kid's Book of Healing and Hope* by Marc Gellman  
*Caterpillar Jones and the Adventures of Nut E. Squirrel* by J.J. Brothers  
*Charlie the Caterpillar* by Dom Deluise  
*Dear Bear* by Joanna Harrison  
*Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting  
*Gabby the Gecko* by Paris Goodyear-Brown  
*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein  
*The Hurt* by Teddi Doleski  
*I Don't Want to Sleep Tonight* by Debra Norville  
*I Lost My Bear* by Jules Feiffer  
*The Lion Who Wanted to Love* by Giles Andreae and David Wojtowycz  
*Listen Buddy* by Helen Lester  
*Little Flower: A Journey of Caring* by Laura McAndrew  
*Little Girl Lost* by Drew Barrymore and Todd Gold  
*The Meanest Thing to Say* by Bill Cosby  
*Mr. Worry, A Story About OCD* by Holly L. Niner  
*The Mitten* by Jan Brett  
*No Biting, Horrible Crocodile!* by Jonathan Shipton  
*Owls in the Family* by Farley Mowat  
*Percival the Plain Little Caterpillar* by Helen Brawley  
*Sailing Through the Storm: To the Ocean of Peace* by Edie Julik  
*The Stray Dog* by Marc Simont  
*The Very Quiet Cricket* by Eric Carle  
*Little Bunny's Sleepless Night* by Carol Roth and Valeri Gorbachev  
*Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes  
*When I'm Angry: A Language of Parenting Guide* by Jane Aaron  
*When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry ...* by Molly Bang  
*You Are Special* by Max Lucado  
*You Remind Me of You: A Poetry Memoir* by Eirann Corrigan  
*You've Got Dragons* by Kathryn Cave and Nick Maland

## Secondary Books

### *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson

At the end of the summer before she enters high school, Melinda attends a party at which two bad things happen to her: She gets drunk and she is raped. She withdraws into herself, rarely talking, cutting classes, ignoring assignments and becoming more apart from the world each day. Mr. Freeman, her art teacher, works with her to express what she has so deeply repressed.

### *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier

Jerry Renault is trying to get through his freshman year of high school. All he wants to do is fit in until one day a secret society, the Vigils, changes that. In this story, a harmless chocolate sale turns into a war.

### *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher

Eric and Sarah are school friends with a lot in common: both are misfits – Eric because he's grossly fat and Sarah because of hideous scars from a childhood accident. When Eric starts losing weight, he fears he'll lose Sarah's friendship.

### *Ironman* by Chris Crutcher

Bo Brewster, through his letters to talk show host Larry King, tells of his problematic relationship with his father. Instead of having conflict with his father, he lashes out at his English teacher/football coach and is forced to go to an anger management group where interesting things start to happen in his life.

*Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher

There's bad news and good news about the Cutter High School swim team. The bad news is that they don't have a pool. The good news is that only one of them can swim anyway. A group of misfits trying to find their places in a school that has no place for them, the Cutter All Night Mermen struggle to carve out their own turf.

*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

See what happens when two rival gangs, the Greasers, from the wrong side of the track, and the Socs, the preppy crowd, clash. See and feel how Pony's life is changed by the death of his friend, Johnny.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Scout, a young girl in a quiet southern town, is about to experience dramatic events that will affect the rest of her life. She and her brother Jem are being raised by their widower father Atticus and by a strong-minded housekeeper Calpurnia. Wide-eyed Scout is fascinated with the sensitively revealed by people of her small town but, from the start, there's a rumble of thunder just under the calm surface of life here. The black people of the community have a special feeling about Scout's father and she doesn't know why. A few of her white friends are inexplicably hostile and Scout doesn't understand this either. Unpleasant things are shouted and the bewildered girl turns to her father. Atticus, a lawyer, explains that he's defending a young Negro wrongfully accused of a grave crime.

*The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

*The Call of the Wild* tells the story of a dog named Buck. He is stolen from his home in California and taken to the Alaskan gold fields to be a sled dog. This story tells the life of Buck as he is passed from owner to owner. He eventually finds a kind master, John Thornton.

*Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson

Within Cole Matthews lies anger, rage and hate. Cole has been stealing and fighting for years. This time he caught Peter Driscall in the parking lot and smashed his head against the sidewalk. For his punishment, Cole is offered Circle Justice, a system based on Native American traditions that attempts to provide healing for the criminal offender, the victim and the community.

*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

A boy named Brian is on a trip to the Canadian oilfields to spend the summer with his dad. When the pilot of the small plane in which Brian is traveling suffers a heart attack and dies, Brian must land the plane and learn to survive in the wilderness. He faces many dangers including hunger, animal attacks and even a tornado. This book gives the reader a better understanding of what it is like to survive in an untamed land.

*Dogsong* by Gary Paulsen

A 14-year-old Eskimo youth named Russel prepares to escape the modern-day world and to embrace the old ways. He is helped in his quest by Oogruk, an old shaman of the village, who gives him a sled, dogs and spiritual and practical guidance.

*Animal Farm* by George Orwell

After realizing their desire for freedom, the animals of Manor Farm chase Mr. Jones off his property and take control. They struggle to create an ideal community. (Animal Farm is a parody of the events of the Russian Revolution and the years following it.)

*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Billy and his two dogs form a strong, loving bond while hunting together for raccoons. Victory comes to the three of them, as well as great sorrow.

*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

Two migrant workers, George and Lennie, have been let off a bus miles away from the California farm where they are due to start work. Overcome with thirst, the two stop in a clearing by a pool and decide to camp for the night. As the two converse, it becomes clear that Lennie has a mild mental disability and is deeply devoted to George and dependent upon him for protection and guidance. George finds that Lennie, who loves petting soft things but often accidentally kills them, has been carrying and stroking a dead mouse. He angrily throws it away, fearing that Lennie might catch a disease from the dead animal. George complains loudly that his life would be easier without having to care for Lennie, but the reader senses that their friendship and devotion is mutual. He and Lennie share a dream of buying their own piece of land, farming it and, much to Lennie's delight, keeping rabbits. George ends the night by treating Lennie to the story he often tells him about what life will be like in such an idyllic place.

*The Pearl* by John Steinbeck

Kino, a poor Mexican pearl fisher, finds a valuable pearl. Yet instead of bringing blessings, the pearl acts as a harbinger of misfortune to Kino and his wife, Juana. Ultimately, it is returned from whence it came.

The Language of

# Trauma and Loss

## Lesson Plans

*Elementary Lesson Plan:*  
**Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary  
Day That Wasn't**

[www.pbs4549.org/trauma](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma)



# Elementary Lesson Plan: Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary Day That Wasn't

Bridgett Bunny just loved ordinary days. She loved waking up early in the morning and seeing the sun streaking down through the trees in her forest home. She loved having berries and cream for breakfast and then going down to the Pine Woods with her friends. Fred E. Frog, Chester Cricket and Sara Squirrel were always fun to meet on the way to the woods. They had so much fun together. As they hopped along they loved hearing the crunching sound of the leaves under their feet. Often they would stop and sing with the birds as they passed by their tree. Sometimes they would find delicious nuts and berries to eat. "Welcome, welcome," Wise Old Owl would hoot as they got near Pine Woods for the beginning of their school day. "Look whoooo's here," he would say kindly. Wise Old Owl was in the Pine Woods to teach the small creatures about the ways of the woods.

Even though Bridgett, Fred, Chester and Sara enjoyed listening to Wise Old Owl, the best part of the day was the time after school when the four friends had lots of time to play. "Let's go wade in the creek," Chester would chirp. "Yeah, we can catch some small fish," Fred would add. Sara and Bridgett loved it when they would go exploring in the nearby caves. The cozy dens were a great place for sharing secrets. Just as it would start to get dark, they would say their good-byes and each go to their homes where a nice, warm supper was waiting. After supper, a bath and some stories, Bridgett would snuggle down into her bed. She would dream of her friends and smile with thoughts of the next day and all the fun they would have. Bridgett always had sweet dreams. Yes, Bridgett loved ordinary days.

On one ordinary day, though, everything changed. Something very bad, sad and scary happened. Bridgett felt awful. She couldn't enjoy her ordinary days anymore. She had bad dreams that often kept her awake at night. In the mornings she would be tired and cranky. Nothing was the same. She didn't feel bright and sunny. She felt like everything was covered with darkness. There was no place she wanted to be. She didn't want to go to school in the Pine Woods. She had trouble remembering Wise Old Owl's lessons. After school she didn't want to play in the stream or pick berries or find fun things to watch. When Chester would

chirp cheerfully, "Let's have a race to the cave," Bridgett would turn and hop the other way. Fred would croak, "Bridge, don't go!" But Bridgett would just hop straight home. Her friends were worried about her. "What's wrong with Bridge?" they would ask each other. They tried to talk with her, but she didn't want to talk. Bridgett didn't want to talk with anyone! She grew angry and scared because she didn't understand why the bad, sad and scary thing had to happen. Sometimes she would go off into the woods alone and cry and cry.

One day, as she was sitting with her back to her favorite tree, she heard someone coming. She got scared and wanted to run away, but her feet didn't seem to want to move. Her heart beat faster and faster as the sound got nearer. She hid her face in her arms so she wouldn't have to see the scary thing. She jumped as she felt a soft, gentle touch on her shoulder. When she looked up she found Wise Old Owl looking at her with kindness in his eyes. "Bridgett, we have all been very worried about you," he said. "I know that something very bad happened to you. Would you like to talk with me about it?"

As Wise Old Owl settled onto the moss beside Bridgett, the little bunny began to tell him all that had happened. She was able to tell Owl how angry and scared she was. Owl was able to tell her that it wasn't her fault and to reassure her that she was fine now. As they talked, Bridgett began to feel a little better. They walked home together. For the first time in a long time, Bridgett ate a good supper and went to bed without having bad dreams.

The next morning she was waiting for her friends, ready to hop to the Pine Woods to have fun. Little by little, she began to enjoy all the parts of her ordinary day. Sometimes she would remember the bad, sad and scary thing and get a little upset again. But now she knew that she could talk with Wise Old Owl or with her mom and dad, and that she would feel better. Her ordinary days would never be exactly the same, but they would be very good again. Bridgett once again felt sunny.

You can access a Web-streamed version of this story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm). It is also available in storybook form with illustrations at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm).

# Beginning, Middle and End of Story (Grades K-1)

## Lesson Overview

This lesson has two objectives. The first is to address the standards listed below. The second is to provide an avenue for the students and teacher to discuss both emotional and physical safety at home and at school.

The story *Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary Day That Wasn't* is the focus of this lesson. Bridgett Bunny is a happy little bunny, living ordinary days until something very bad, sad and scary happens to her. She becomes withdrawn, which worries her friends. Wise Old Owl is able to get her to talk with him and to reassure her that she is safe now and can go on with her life.

## Standards

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text:

1. Use title page, photographs, captions and illustrations (text features) to develop comprehension of informational text.
2. Identify the sequence of events in informational text.
3. Ask questions concerning essential elements of informational text.
4. Identify central ideas and supporting details of informational text with teacher assistance.
5. Follow multiple-step directions.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Provide own interpretation of story, using information from the text.
2. Identify characters, setting and events in a story.
3. Retell the beginning, middle and ending of a story, including its important events.

## Materials

- A copy of *Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary Day That Wasn't* (You can access a Web-streamed version of the story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm). It is also available in storybook form at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm).)
- Crayons
- One sheet of paper, folded in thirds lengthwise, for each student
- Chart paper
- Markers (two colors)

## Procedure

1. Begin the lesson by taking a look at the front cover and the title of the book with the students. Allow them to predict what the story is about.
2. After hearing several options, proceed with reading the story and showing the illustrations.
3. Avoid discussion after you have finished reading the story.
4. Ask students to go back to their seat and, on the paper given, draw the beginning, middle and end of the story.
5. When students have completed this, have them come back to the story circle and share their illustrations with the class. Listen closely for interpretations of what the bad, sad and scary thing was.
6. Lead the students in a discussion of physical and emotional safety in your classroom, school or at home.
7. Make a class list of things that make the children feel safe. Use one color of marker for items the children can control and another color for items that adults have to handle. Post the list.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is fairly easy for the standards represented in this lesson. The pictures of beginning, middle and end will reveal the students' understanding of the story.

Evaluation of the understanding of what makes them feel safe may be a little more difficult. If any students portray information that causes you concern, be sure to refer them to the school counselor for further evaluation.

# Time Lines and Sequence (Grade 1-2)

## Lesson Overview

This lesson has two objectives. The first is to address the standards listed below. The second is to provide an avenue for the students and teacher to discuss both emotional and physical safety at home and at school.

Bridgett is a happy little bunny, living ordinary days until something very bad, sad and scary happens to her. She becomes withdrawn, which worries her friends. Wise Old Owl is able to get her to talk with him and reassures her that she is safe now and can go on with her life.

The lesson is designed for students who have already had an introduction to time lines.

## Standards

### Reading Comprehension Strategies

1. Establish a purpose for reading (e.g., to be informed, to follow directions or to be entertained).
2. Predict content, events and outcomes from illustrations and prior experience and support those predictions with examples from the text or background knowledge.
3. Summarize text by reading main ideas and some supporting details.
4. Create and use graphic organizers to demonstrate comprehension.

### Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text

1. Arrange events from informational text in sequential order.

### Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Retell the plot of the story.

### Listening and Viewing

1. Compare what is heard with prior knowledge and experience.
2. Follow two- and three-step oral directions.

### Social Studies: History: Chronology: Heritage

1. Place a series of related events in chronological order on a time line
2. Describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence the behavior of people living in a particular culture.

## Materials

- A copy of *Bridgett Bunny's Ordinary Day That Wasn't* (You can access a Web-streamed version of the story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm). It is also available in storybook form at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/stories.htm).)
- One 11"-by-18" piece of manila paper for each student
- Scissors
- Crayons
- Glue
- Ruler
- Chart paper
- Markers (two colors)

## Procedure

1. After giving each student an 11"-by-18" sheet of manila paper, ask them to fold it in half the long way.
2. Students may then cut on the fold to get two long pieces of paper. These pieces should be glued together to create one long piece. Leave these on desks to dry while students gather in the story center.
3. Have students predict what the story is about by looking at the cover, title, etc. Ask for supporting reasons for their predictions (e.g., Why do you think this is a story about forest animals?).
4. Read the story, sharing the beautiful illustrations as you go. Postpone discussion for now.
5. Ask students to go back to their desks and create a time line for the events in the story.
6. When the time lines are completed, post them around the room.
7. Now take time to discuss the events of the story and their sequence. Listen carefully for students' interpretations of what the bad, sad, scary thing was. Lead students in a discussion of physical and emotional safety in your classroom, school and in their homes.
8. Make a list of things that make the children feel safe. Use one color of marker for situations that the children can control and another color for situations that require adult intervention.

## Evaluation

Standard Number 1 under Reading Comprehension Strategies and Standard Number 2 under Social Studies may be evaluated through the pre and post reading discussions. All other standards listed may be evaluated from the time lines that the students created.

| CATEGORY                | 4   | 3  | 2   | 1                               |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Documentation of Events | At least four significant events are shown.           | At least three significant events are shown. | At least two significant events are shown.    | One significant event is shown. |
| Accuracy                | All events are in the proper order.                   | All but one event is in the proper order.    | Two events are in the proper order.           |                                 |
| Neatness                | Work is clear. There is a distinction between events. | Work has marginally clear events.            | Two events are separated but distinguishable. | Cannot tell what the event is.  |

Evaluation of the understanding of what makes the students feel safe may be a little more difficult. The list generated at the end of the lesson will be useful in this evaluation. If any students share information that causes you concern, be sure to refer them to the school counselor for further evaluation.

# Poster Power (Grades 3-4)

## Lesson Overview

Students will work in teams to create posters showing each story element: character, setting, plot, problem and solution.

## Standards

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Describe the thoughts, words and interactions of characters.
2. Identify the influence of setting on the selection.
3. Identify the main incidents of a plot sequence, identifying the major conflict and its resolutions.

Prewriting

4. Use organizational strategies (e.g., brainstorming, lists, webs and Venn diagrams) to plan writing.

Drafting, Revising and Editing

5. Organize writing, beginning with an introduction, body and resolution of plot, followed by a closing statement or a summary of important ideas and details.
6. Vary simple, compound and complex sentence structure.
8. Vary language and style as appropriate to audience and purpose.
9. Use available technology to compose text.
14. Proofread writing and edit to improve conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization) and identify and correct fragments and run-ons.

Publishing

15. Prepare for publication (e.g., for display or for sharing with others) writing that follows a format appropriate to the purpose using techniques such as electronic resources and graphics to enhance the final product.

## Materials

Part 1:

- Story element cards
- Poster paper
- Variety of colored pencils, markers or crayons
- Writing materials or computers

Part 2:

- Writing materials or computers

## Procedure

Part 1:

After reading the story aloud to the class (or watching the video), review the story elements. Discuss each element and add story element cards to the board.

1. Review story elements:

- a. Character:** Who was the story about? Why were they important characters?
  - b. Setting:** Where and when did the story take place?
  - c. Plot:** What was the sequence of events? What happened first? Next? Then what happened?
  - d. Problem:** Was there a problem in the story? What was it?
  - e. Solution:** How was the problem solved?
2. After discussion, divide students into five teams. Each team is assigned a story element.
  3. Teams create a poster representing their element.
  4. Teams share posters.
  5. Display the posters in the classroom.

Part 2:

Using information from posters as a review, each student writes a retelling of the story.

## Evaluation

- Completed Poster Rubric
- Writing Rubric

### Completed Poster Rubric

| CATEGORY             | 4  | 3   | 2  | 1   |
|----------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Content and Accuracy | At least seven accurate facts are displayed on the poster.   | Five to six accurate facts are displayed on the poster.   | Three to four accurate facts are displayed on the poster.  | Less than three accurate facts are displayed on the poster.     |
| Labels               | All items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled with labels that can be read from at least 3 ft. away. | Almost all items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled with labels that can be read from at least 3 ft. away. | Several items of importance on the poster are clearly labeled with labels that can be read from at least 3 ft. away. | Labels are too small to view OR no important items are labeled. |
| Graphics and Clarity | Graphics are all in focus and the content is easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.                       | Most graphics are in focus and the content is easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.                             | Most graphics are in focus and the content is easily viewed and identified from 4 ft. away.                          | Many graphics are not clear or are too small.                   |

### Writing Rubric

| CATEGORY                           | 4  | 3  | 2   | 1  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Accuracy of Facts (Content)        | All supportive facts are reported accurately.  | Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.   | Most supportive facts are reported accurately.  | NO facts are reported OR most are inaccurately reported.   |
| Grammar and Spelling (Conventions) | Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.                                 | Writer makes one or two errors in grammar or spelling.   | Writer makes three or four errors in grammar or spelling.   | Writer makes more than four errors in grammar or spelling.   |
| Sequencing (Organization)          | Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.       | Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented sometimes makes the writing less interesting.                 | Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.   | Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.                          |
| Flow and Rhythm (Sentence Fluency) | All sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud. Each sentence is clear and has an obvious emphasis. | Almost all sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud, but one or two are stiff and awkward or difficult to understand. | Most sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud, but several are stiff and awkward or are difficult to understand. | The sentences are difficult to read aloud because they sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive or are difficult to understand. |

**Character**

**Setting**

**Plot**

**Problem**

**Solution**

# Can It Be ... ? (Grades 3-4)

## Overview

Students will create two labels – first, describing characters from the story and second, describing themselves. Each student will then use the label describing himself or herself as a prewrite for a descriptive paragraph. The paragraphs will then be placed inside containers, which will be used to help the students identify the importance of understanding the qualities of a character.

## Standards

### Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Describe the thoughts, words and interactions of characters.

### Writing Process

4. Use organizational strategies (e.g. brainstorming, lists, webs and Venn diagrams) to plan writing.

### Drafting, Revising and Editing

5. Organize writing, beginning with an introduction, body and resolution of plot, followed by a closing statement or a summary of important ideas and details.
6. Vary simple, compound and complex sentence structures.
8. Vary language and style as appropriate to audience and purpose.
9. Use available technology to compose text.
14. Proofread writing and edit to improve conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization) and identify and correct fragments and run-ons.

### Publishing

16. Prepare for publication (e.g., for display or for sharing with others) writing that follows a format appropriate to the purpose using techniques such as electronic resources and graphics to enhance the final product.

## Materials

### Part 1:

- A soup can with the label removed; save label for demonstration
- For each class group, an empty can with the label removed
- White construction paper cut to label size
- A variety of markers, crayons and colored pencils

### Part 2:

- The items listed above
- Writing materials or computers

## Procedure

### Part 1:

1. Show students a soup can with the label removed. Ask if they can tell what's inside the can just by looking at the outside.
2. After discussion, read the ingredients listed on the label and ask if they can now tell what's inside the can. Why was it easier to talk about the contents when they knew the ingredients?
3. Relate how it is easier to understand or be understood when someone knows the true character of a person.
4. Brainstorm a list of adjectives that describe the qualities of the can of soup.
5. Compare the list of qualities to the ingredients listed on the can. You may think some are more desirable than others, but they all go together to make a terrific can of soup (show the label).
6. Divide students into five teams. Each team is assigned a character from the story. Their task is to design a label representing their character.
7. The teams share their new can labels.

### Part 2:

1. Students design labels representing themselves.
2. Using the label as a prewriting activity, each student writes a descriptive paragraph about himself or herself.
3. Place completed paragraphs inside the cans
4. Share and/or display cans.

## Evaluation

- Soup Can Rubric
- Writing Rubric

Soup Can Rubric

| CATEGORY | 4  | 3   | 2  | 1  |
|----------|--|---|--|--|
| Images   | Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism. | Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism. | An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere or tone, but it needed more work. Image choice is logical. | Little or no attempt was made to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere or tone. |

Writing Rubric

|                                    | 4  | 3  | 2   | 1  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Accuracy of Facts (Content)        | All supportive facts are reported accurately.  | Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.   | Most supportive facts are reported accurately.  | NO facts are reported OR most are inaccurately reported.   |
| Grammar and Spelling (Conventions) | Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.                                 | Writer makes one or two errors in grammar or spelling.   | Writer makes three or four errors in grammar or spelling.   | Writer makes more than four errors in grammar or spelling.   |
| Sequencing (Organization)          | Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.       | Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented sometimes makes the writing less interesting.                 | Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.   | Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.                          |
| Flow and Rhythm (Sentence Fluency) | All sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud. Each sentence is clear and has an obvious emphasis. | Almost all sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud, but one or two are stiff and awkward or difficult to understand. | Most sentences sound natural and are easy-on-the-ear when read aloud, but several are stiff and awkward or are difficult to understand. | The sentences are difficult to read aloud because they sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive or are difficult to understand. |

The Language of

# Trauma and Loss

## Lesson Plans

*Middle School Lesson Plan:*

**The Story of Erica**



# The Story of Erica

A deafening silence swept across the room as Erica V. stood and pulled a piece of paper from the hip pocket of her jeans. Nineteen uncertain pairs of eyes watched as she slowly stepped to the front of the room, placed the crumpled wad of paper on the podium and wiped her hands across its surface in a desperate attempt to iron out the seemingly permanent creases.

It was Celebration Day, a day when eighth grade emerging writers slurped and sipped sugary teas, dunked homemade cookies in milky coffee and hot chocolate, and shared their best pieces of writing from the past quarter in an environment where they felt safe and protected. One by one they proudly read their masterpieces – final drafts of writing developed over a period of nine weeks. Disbelief filled the room when Erica V., who hadn't written more than a line or two the entire last half of the year, began to read.

*"My Best Friend," she started.*

Eyes moved quickly away from Erica as students, glancing nervously at each other, shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

*"My best friend was somebody I don't remember," she continued. "Many people loved him and a few didn't. He had an alcohol addiction since he was 17 years old. He had a police record and was hardly ever sober. His name was Mike."*

Erica paused. Silence and surprise continued as she once again became the focus of all attention, this time for her words rather than her actions. This was not the unpredictable, angry 14-year-old they had become used to.

*Erica V. wasn't entirely new to our class. She had been with us all through elementary school. She laughed with us and played games with us on the playground. When seventh grade started, Erica didn't. Rumors flew about "juvie" and something about a home for girls in Iowa. Halfway through eighth grade, a different Erica showed up in our English class, this one with an image to protect, one punctuated by the snake tattooed on her arm, the too-tight jeans and the tough-girl walk that carried her through the halls.*

*"I don't write," Erica said slowly and calmly as Ms. Crowley stood next to her chair the day she arrived. "We all write in here, Erica," Ms. Crowley returned. "And we share what we write with those we trust. You'll come to know that this is a safe place to be."*

*"Maybe you didn't hear me. I ... don't ... write," Erica said as she leaned back in her seat, stretched her legs and glared. She wasn't about to risk her image because of a dumb woman who didn't have a clue.*

*"Mike had a lot of good in him," Erica V. went on. "He liked to hunt and fish, and he liked to drink."*

Erica paused again. A tear slowly streaked its way down her cheek as she related the story of Mike and his friends, Jimmy and Charlie, drinking at a party, driving home and speeding into a tree, instantly killing all three of them. After a deep breath, one that lifted her shoulders a full four or five inches, Erica looked up from her paper and finished.

*"Mike was my dad."*

As she walked to the back of the room, she wiped a final tear from her eye and slipped into her seat. Three minutes of complete silence was finally broken when one by one, students began applauding and Tim stretched his arm across the aisle to rest his hand on Erica's shoulder.

You can access a Web-streamed version of this story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm).

# Using Descriptive Language

## Lesson Overview

Students will use the story of Erica (either video or text copy) to identify specific words and phrases that make them feel like they are right there in the action. Discuss reasons why the author chose these words and phrases.

## Standards

### Writing Processes

- 9. Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose.

### Reading Applications: Literary Text

- 8. Explain ways in which the author conveys mood and tone through word choice, figurative language and syntax.

## Materials

- *The Story of Erica* (You can access a Web-streamed version of the story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm).)
- Descriptive Language worksheet

## Procedures

1. Pass out Descriptive Language worksheet
2. After the students have read the story or watched the video about Erica, ask them to identify and list specific nouns, vivid adjectives and precise verbs that show action, character and setting. Discuss.
3. Have the students identify words or phrases that they believe to be weak. List these on the board. Discuss possible replacement words or phrases.

4. Finally, have the students complete Section Three of the Descriptive Language worksheet, replacing general nouns and verbs with more specific ones and adding adjectives that are more descriptive.

## Evaluation

Base your evaluation on the written responses and/or discussion. The written responses may be evaluated using the following checklist:

### Fluency

- The meaning of the each of the sentences is clear
- There are no sentence fragments

### Word Choice

- Every word seems just right
- I use a lot of descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs)
- My words paint pictures in the reader's mind
- I use strong words like "darted" and "exclaimed"
- I use synonyms to add variety

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

# Descriptive Language

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Good writers use specific nouns, vivid adjectives and precise verbs to show action, character and setting in a way that makes readers feel that they are part of the action. Look at the story of Erica. Which words and/or phrases help place you in the scene? List them below.

Are there any words or phrases in the story that you think are weak? What words would you use instead?

Rewrite the sentences below, replacing general nouns and verbs with more specific ones. Add adjectives so that the language is descriptive.

The man looked tired.

Her eyes were blue.

We went back to the car.

# Protagonist/Antagonist

## Lesson Overview

After reading the story and/or watching the video, the teacher will introduce or review the concept of protagonist and antagonist. Students will discuss in writing the personality of the identified protagonist of the story.

## Materials

- Writing supplies or a computer
- Story and/or video about Erica
- Protagonist/Antagonist Worksheet

## Standards Addressed

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Identify and explain various types of characters and how their interactions and conflicts affect the plot.
4. Compare and contrast different points of view and explain how voice affects literary text.

## Procedure

1. After the students have read the story and/or watched the video about Erica, lead them in a discussion about the concepts of protagonist and antagonist. Explain how the conflict can be within the person as well as with others.
2. Ask the students to identify the protagonist and the antagonist in Erica's story using the Protagonist/Antagonist Worksheet.
3. Have the students write a brief description of changes that occur within the protagonist during the course of the story.

## Evaluation

Writing Rubric

| CATEGORY                                     | 4   | 3  | 2  | 1   |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Focus on Topic (Content)                     | There is one clear, well-focused topic. The main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.                  | The main idea is clear but the supporting information is general.  | The main idea is somewhat clear but there is a need for more supporting information.   | The main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.  |
| Grammar and Spelling (Conventions)           | The writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.                                | The writer makes one or two errors in grammar or spelling.   | The writer makes three or four errors in grammar or spelling.  | The writer makes more than four errors in grammar or spelling.  |
| Capitalization and Punctuation (Conventions) | The writer makes no errors in capitalization or punctuation, so the paper is very easy to read.                             | The writer makes one or two errors in capitalization or punctuation, but the paper is still easy to read.    | The writer makes a few errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow. | The writer makes several errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and greatly interrupt the flow.            |
| Adding Personality (Voice)                   | The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience. The author has taken the ideas and made them his or her "own." | The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but there is some lack of ownership of the topic. | The writer relates some of his own knowledge or experience, but it adds nothing to the discussion of the topic.              | The writer has not tried to transform the information in a personal way. The ideas and the way they are expressed seem to belong to someone else. |
| Conclusion (Organization)                    | The conclusion is strong and enables the reader to understand the writer's point.   | The conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all the loose ends.  | The conclusion is recognizable, but does not tie up several loose ends.  | There is no clear conclusion; the paper just ends.  |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Protagonist/Antagonist Worksheet

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The **protagonist** of a work of fiction is the story's main character – the one who arouses the most interest and sympathy in the reader. The protagonist usually struggles or competes against an **antagonist**, which might be another character, a force of nature or a force within the protagonist.

Identify the protagonist and the antagonist in the story about Erica.

Do you think the personality of the protagonist has changed? Write a paragraph explaining your answer. Explain why you think the change was either made or not made by Erica.

# Can You Remember?

## Lesson Overview

In this activity students will be given the opportunity to examine experiences in their own lives, be they good or bad. They will then discuss insights that they have gained due to these experiences.

## Standards

Reading Applications:

5. Identify and explain universal themes across different works by the same author and by different authors.

Writing Applications

2. Write responses to literature that organize an insightful interpretation around several clear ideas, premises or images and support judgments with specific references to the original text, to other texts, to authors and to prior knowledge.

## Materials

- Writing material or a computer
- The video or text of Erica's story
- The Can You Remember? Worksheet

## Procedure

1. Discuss the experiences of Erica from the beginning of the story until the end. List these on the board.
2. Discuss insights Erica may have gained from these experiences. List these on the board next to the appropriate experience.
3. Invite students to examine their own lives to find experiences that may have changed them in some way and to realize the insights that they gained from these experiences. They should write their responses on the worksheet.
4. To take the lesson one step further, invite students to write a response using information on their charts, supporting statements and reference to their own lives.

## Evaluation

The teacher can use the discussion as a springboard to the independent writing activity. The Writing Rubric can be used.

Writing Rubric

| CATEGORY  | 4   | 3  | 2  | 1   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Focus on Topic<br>(Content)                     | There is one clear, well-focused topic. The main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.                  | The main idea is clear but the supporting information is general.  | The main idea is somewhat clear but there is a need for more supporting information.   | The main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.  |
| Grammar and Spelling<br>(Conventions)           | The writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.                                | The writer makes one or two errors in grammar or spelling.   | The writer makes three or four errors in grammar or spelling.  | The writer makes more than four errors in grammar or spelling.  |
| Capitalization and Punctuation<br>(Conventions) | The writer makes no errors in capitalization or punctuation, so the paper is very easy to read.                             | The writer makes one or two errors in capitalization or punctuation, but the paper is still easy to read.                    | The writer makes a few errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow. | The writer makes several errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and greatly interrupt the flow.            |
| Sequencing<br>(Organization)                    | Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.          | Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented sometimes makes the writing less interesting. | Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.  | Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.   |
| Adding Personality<br>(Voice)                   | The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience. The author has taken the ideas and made them his or her "own." | The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but there is some lack of ownership of the topic.                 | The writer relates some of his own knowledge or experience, but it adds nothing to the discussion of the topic.              | The writer has not tried to transform the information in a personal way. The ideas and the way they are expressed seem to belong to someone else. |
| Conclusion<br>(Organization)                    | The conclusion is strong and enables the reader to understand the writer's point.   | The conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all the loose ends.  | The conclusion is recognizable, but does not tie up several loose ends.  | There is no clear conclusion; the paper just ends.  |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Can You Remember?

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Difficult experiences often help people to mature. Think about an experience of yours that caused you to gain insight into yourself and the adult world. Use the chart below to show how your views or feelings changed as a result of the experience.

**Experience**

**Insight**

The Language of

# Trauma and Loss

## Lesson Plans

*High School Lesson Plan:*

Erica's List



# Erica's List

The chemicals in the beaker obediently turned sapphire blue, just as the happily absorbed high school science teacher had said they would. "Taa-daa," Mr. Vitroski sang with a cheesy Broadway flourish of his arms at the end of the demonstration experiment. "That's what's so wonderful about science. That's what's so wonderful about this world and life itself. It's all a series of predictable reactions to a stimulus."

"Bullsh—," coughed Erica into her hand. A few students reacted with raised eyebrows and grins. They'd heard Erica's "coughs" before, especially in the unanimously hated Señora Riguli's class, but usually her profanities were muffled enough that only the students understood what was said. Erica must have been slipping because Mr. V. was staring seriously at her. Either that, or Erica had meant to be heard.

"Even that was a predictable reaction to a stimulus," said Mr. Vitroski quietly. He was staring straight at Erica. "What happens in this world isn't predictable at all, but most of the reactions and outcomes are."

"Like I said," dared Erica slowly and deliberately, "that's a pile of steaming bull..." The bell rang over her comment and 26 high school students, Erica among them, mechanically packed and stacked their books, and then shoved themselves into the overcrowded hallway.

Exactly 14 minutes later, Erica was summoned from her art class to the assistant principal's office. She picked at the paint on her left hand as she waited in the office for Mr. Jones to open the door. She'd been here before. In fact, she was a regular since she'd come to the high school. Elementary hadn't been that way. Erica remembered elementary school as colored maps with strange countries and oversized books full of wondrous stories. But things had changed during the middle school years and only gotten worse since high school. Erica knew she was in for a lecture, a series of questions that no one wanted to hear the answers to, and a chunk of detentions or maybe even a day out. She didn't care. It was all the same to her. Jones didn't scare her. The door opened and Erica saw that it was Mr. V. waiting for her, not Mr. Jones. Okay, she amended silently, two lectures instead of one. Mr. Vitroski ushered her into the office and closed the door.

Erica didn't wait to be asked. She chose to sit in the chair closest to the wall and plopped down defiantly, taking a "so what" posture to let Mr. V. know that she wasn't afraid. Mr. V. didn't sit down behind the desk in Mr. Jones' chair; instead, he sat beside Erica, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and looked at the floor. "I want to talk about what you said in today's

class," he said quietly. Erica didn't answer. She figured Mr. V. would yell a while and then Mr. Jones would come in to assign the suspensions. Erica knew from experience that her own presence wasn't really even necessary in the coming "talk."

"In art class, yellow and blue make green," said Mr. Vitroski. "They always do and they always will. It's a predictable reaction." He was quiet awhile and then continued. "In English class, a negative adverb added to a sentence reverses the verb. 'I do see you' becomes 'I do not see you.' The meaning is reversed — another predictable outcome from an action. In math class, improper fractions, when simplified, will always contain a whole number. Again, predictable. Even your social studies class has predictable outcomes and responses. If a country ignores its masses of poor and glorifies its few privileged, bet on a revolution coming right around the corner. In my class, if we remove oxygen from water, we are left with hydrogen. The world isn't controllable, Erica, but it is pretty predictable. Apparently today in class you didn't agree with that." It didn't sound like a question, but obviously Mr. V. was waiting for an answer. Let him wait, thought Erica.

"Human reactions to a stimulus can be predictable as well," continued Mr. Vitroski even more quietly and slowly. "I said something you didn't agree with and you let me know you were in disagreement, but you didn't say it directly or intelligently. You were belligerent but cautious about, it and you did it in the safety of a crowd." Mr. Vitroski looked directly at Erica, but she continued to stare stonily at the wall. "What I saw happen in those few instants in my class today, Erica, was a predictable reaction. If I work backward, I might be able to define the stimulus." Erica didn't show it, but she was listening. She thought, "So V. thinks he can understand my past by looking at my reactions, now? Yeah right."

"When I see you disagree or add your opinion in a nasty way that is designed to keep you safe, I wonder why you had to learn to do that. Why can't you just speak honestly and have a conversation about it? Why do you always attack and cover at the same time? I'm a science teacher — I look for what caused specific reactions. I can't help but wonder about the stimulus that taught you to behave the way you do." Erica stared ahead in hot silence, so Mr. Vitroski tried a different tack.

"Let's try it this way, Erica," he explained. "Do you remember when we talked about Pavlov's dogs? Erica?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Can you explain it to me?"

"The dogs had a loud bell rung when they ate, so they started salivating every time they heard a bell."

"Even if there was no food?"

"Even if there was no food," answered Erica as expected.

"So they were reacting inappropriately but understandably. Do you get it?" asked Mr. Vitroski.

"You're telling me I'm all screwed up, right? Like those stupid dogs?" exploded Erica, her face red and angry. "Big freaking surprise! Anyone looking at my discipline folder in this office could guess that."

"I'm not telling you that you are screwed up, Erica," said Mr. Vitroski quietly. "I'm telling you that you are perfect and exactly what you should be."

"Oh, yeah, right."

"Yes, I am right. You are exactly, predictably, almost scientifically what you should be. You are, well, perfect."

"And you are, well, insane," mocked Erica. She was a bit surprised to see Mr. V. smile slightly.

"Look, you have obviously been through some sort of time – some sort of trauma that I can't possibly imagine." Erica looked away from Mr. Vitroski's face to the wall and crossed her arms, doing her best to appear bored. "I am not trained to handle whatever that is, and I don't pretend to think it's my business."

"You're right. It is none of your business."

"I agree, Erica. That's not why I called you in here. Believe me or don't believe me," continued Mr. Vitroski, "but that sort of experience – a hard, bad, high-stress event or series of events in a person's life – changes the way the brain works. And its outcomes are as predictable as any of the other stimulus-reaction pairings of which I've spoken."

"Oh, so now I'm brain damaged?"

"I didn't say that, Erica. I said your reactions are predictable. There are certain reactions that are the result of tough times. The fact that you react with anger and self-protecting attacks shows me you've had some tough times."

"So what? So what?! Everyone has tough times." Erica retorted. "So what if I react? Who cares?"

"I care," said Mr. Vitroski. "I care because the reactions you use now aren't appropriate. They may have saved you then, but they seem to be the only ones you know, and they aren't working for you now." Erica rolled her eyes and looked away.

"Okay, tell me, Erica, what a rabbit does when it suspects a predator is approaching." Mr. V. asked. "C'mon, you can do this."

"It freezes. Big deal."

"Right, it freezes. It seems to know that the predator can't pick it out from the background scenery, so it freezes. It becomes invisible and saves its own life. It's a good strategy – a good response and reaction – to a predator. But what happens if it uses that response when a car is approaching?"

"Road kill," Erica responded.

Mr. Vitroski grinned slightly again. "Exactly. The rabbit knows only one response to a stressful situation. That reaction and response saved its life many times before. But because the rabbit cannot change its pattern of behavior – because the rabbit cannot realize that this behavior pattern of his even exists and that it certainly isn't appropriate in this approaching car situation – we now have, as you put it, road kill."

"So now I'm a rabbit?"

"No, Erica, you are not a rabbit. But you are, in a small way, behaving like one. You have developed a pattern of response and it seems to be the only one you know. Somehow, in ways I'll never know or understand, it saved your life before. But you aren't in immediate danger in my classroom. You're safe there."

Mr. Vitroski watched Erica's eyes begin to redden and her mouth to tighten. He looked down to give Erica her privacy, but he continued talking. "You're safe, and yet you're using only your old response. It's a good response in your head, Erica. It's completely automatic and it's worked before. It's the one your head knows and reaches for. You don't even have to think about it. But in my room and apparently many other situations in your life, that response is like freezing in front of approaching headlights. It's only getting you into trouble. The rabbit isn't aware of itself, Erica. It can't discern its patterns and reactions and then learn when they are necessary and when, instead, they are trouble. You can."

"You don't know me," said Erica quietly. "You don't know my story." Her face was turned downward and Mr. Vitroski watched her try to hide behind her own hair.

"No, I don't know you. Not completely. But I do know the reactions and responses, Erica. I do know that leading with an angry attack is a learned behavior designed to protect the person using it. It's natural and normal to attack first as a means of survival. You are doing what makes sense to you, what has worked before. That's logical. It is, like it or not, perfectly logical."

"Yeah, if I'm so perfect, then what am I doing in here?"

"Humans have a lot of standard reactions and responses to bad stimuli." Mr. V. explained. They're predictable and they're logical. People who have had the big, bad and scary time can shut down like a rabbit. That's one logical response. Or they can attack like a cornered animal. That's another logical response. The problem is that their brains learn that behavior and tend to go back to it very easily. They take what was perfect before and use it as an answer to all problems. Despite the fact that the problems are different, their answer and reaction stays the same. They go back to the exact same response even if it is completely inappropriate for the situation. You did that. And that's why you're here."

Both of them sat silently. Mr. V. looked at the clock and realized Erica had now missed most of her art class. Erica seemed to read his mind. "Well," she asked, "how many detentions do I serve for acting like a rabbit? Is that one in the student handbook with smoking and excessive tardies?" Mr. V. didn't answer, so Erica dropped the tone and asked again. "Okay, how many days for profane language in class and insubordination?"

"I don't know," answered Mr. Vitroski honestly. "Do you have any idea?"

Erica smiled. "Yeah. It's 10 now because this isn't my first time. They run them up when you're a regular like I am."

"The detentions don't seem to change much," said Mr. Vitroski. "How about if you give me 10 responses instead?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Write a list of 10 possible normal human responses to a big, bad and ugly stressful situation," Mr. V. explained. "The reactions have to be understandable and logical responses for the original scary situation, but they also have to end up being harmful later if they are repeated as the only available response to each stressful situation the kid encounters for the rest of his or her life."

You can access a Web-streamed version of this story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm).

# Erica's List

## Lesson Overview

This is a snapshot of a young person whose personality and reactions change due to an unnamed trauma. A teacher attempts to get the young person to see that other responses are available and probably desirable. This can be used to reinforce Ohio Language Arts Academic Content Standards, to inspire creative or narrative writing and to introduce examination of patterns of response to help students grow emotionally.

## Standards

Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies

2. Answer literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

4. Compare and contrast different points of view (e.g., first person and third person limited, omniscient, objective and subjective), and explain how voice affects literary text.

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text

7. Analyze an author's argument, perspective or viewpoint and explain the development of key points.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Identify and explain various types of characters and how their interactions and conflicts affect the plot.

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text

7. Analyze an author's argument, perspective or viewpoint and explain the development of key points.

Writing Process and Conventions – All Indicators  
Acquisition of Vocabulary – All Indicators

## Materials

- A copy of *Erica's List* (You can access a Web-streamed version of the story at [www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm](http://www.pbs4549.org/trauma/video.htm).)
- Writing material – computer or paper and pen
- Dictionary
- Thesaurus

## Procedure

1. If your students know what an idiom is, introduce the idiom "Pavlovian response" and help them understand its meaning. Perhaps examining a few of their own will help. Do they want to eat the moment they walk through the front door after school, hungry or not? Do they react to the ice cream bells the trucks ring through the neighborhood in the summer? Do they get fearful when a parent uses all three of their names? Do their pets react to the sound of a can opener?
2. It might also be helpful to have students understand the "fight, flight or freeze" response to danger in most animals, including humans.
3. Read the story to the students or watch the story on the video.
4. Present the following discussion questions to the students:
  - What did Erika do to get called to the office?
  - Was her teacher angry with her?
  - What was her eventual punishment?
  - Were there differences between the text and the video?
  - We have discussed types of narrators. What type of narrator is this and why is it or isn't it appropriate for this story? Is it important that the narrator can give us an idea of Erica's thinking?
  - Do you think Mr. Vitroski is correct in his belief that human responses to traumatic experiences can "get stuck" and become patterns of behavior that aren't appropriate later? Can you give examples to support your answer?
  - What type of person is Mr. Vitroski? What specifically in the text tells you this?
  - Why does Mr. Vitroski ask Erica to write a list rather than serve the detentions? Was that the correct thing to do? Why or why not?
5. Have the students complete the Writing Assignment worksheet either in groups or individually.
6. Have the students use the print copy of the story and reference material as needed to complete the Erica's List – Vocabulary worksheet.
7. An enrichment activity would include comparing the screen version and the text version of the story.

**Evaluation**  
Writing Rubric

| CATEGORY              | 4   | 3   | 2   | 1   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Focus                 | Maintains focus on topic/subject throughout response.   | May exhibit minor lapses in focus on topic/subject.   | May lose or may exhibit major lapses in focus on topic/subject.                                 | May fail to establish focus on topic/subject.   |
| Organization          | Organization is a logical progression of ideas/events and is unified and complete.              | There is a logical progression of ideas/events and organization is reasonably complete, although minor lapses may be present. | One or more major lapses in the logical progression of ideas/events is evident.                 | Ideas/events are presented in a random fashion.   |
| Vocabulary            | Exhibits skillful use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.                             | Exhibits reasonable use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.   | Exhibits minimal use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.                              | Lacks use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.                                 |
| Support               | Support information is related to and supportive of the topic/subject.                          | Support information has minor weaknesses in relatedness to and/or support of the topic/subject.                               | Support information has major weaknesses in relatedness to and/or support of the topic/subject. | An attempt has been made to add support information, but it was unrelated or confusing. |
| Sentence Fluency      | Demonstrates skillful sentence fluency (varies length, good flow rhythm, and varied structure). | Demonstrates reasonable sentence fluency.   | Demonstrates minimal sentence fluency.  | Sentence fluency is lacking.  |
| Mechanics and Grammar | Paragraph has no errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling.                             | Paragraph has one or two errors in capitalization, punctuation or spelling.   | Paragraph has three to five errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling.                  | Paragraph has six or more errors in punctuation, capitalization or spelling.            |

**Vocabulary**

A percentage grade can be used on this activity by dividing the number correct by the total (12).



# Writing Assignment

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Try to imagine a main character who responds with a single trauma-learned response to situations in his or her life. You may want to make notes on the trauma, the response and the situation in which your character uses the inappropriate response, including, if you'd like, the possible outcome. Now decide what medium you'll use. You might create a children's book, a song, a letter, singing telegram lyrics or a song. Some examples follow:

- *One Choice Chelsea: The Girl Who Only Knew One Answer* might be a ballad
- *The Woeful and Wondrous Ballad of Freezing Frank and the Freight Train* could be a series of advice columns
- *Dear Abby: Every Time I Open My Mouth, I Seem to Get Into Trouble. Just Yesterday ...* might be a character's autobiographical sketch
- *My name is Justin. You know, like just in time; just in case; just in trouble again; just in one of those moods ...* could be the beginning of a newspaper article or editorial

Finally, decide if your character will have a clear resolution and what that resolution might be.

Sketch a plot line for your story, write a rough draft, be prepared to explain your medium choice and be ready to share it with the class in group editing readings before you publish.

You will be graded on how well you addressed the aspects of your medium/genre choice; on the development of your main character through action, speech and description; and on the mechanics and conventions of good writing.

# Erica's List — Vocabulary

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Using the print copy of the story and reference material as needed, answer the following questions:

1. "Flourish" comes from a Latin word meaning to bloom. Why does this make sense?
2. "Unum" means one. "Animus" means mind. Which word in the story comes from these word parts?
3. The original literal meaning of the word "profane" is outside the temple. What are profanities and why does this make sense?
4. Are "amending soil" and "amending an opinion" anything alike? Why or why not?
5. In Middle English, "usher" means door. Why is this appropriate? Make sure your explanation takes into account how "ushered" was used in the story above.
6. Can "acting defiantly" be a good thing? How?
7. Does "glorifies" have a positive or negative connotation? Explain your answer.
8. Belligerent and bellicose are similar words. What is the base of both of them and what does it mean?
9. What is the plural form of stimulus?
10. The word "tack" probably made you think of a short pin with a wide head. It doesn't mean that in the story. What is the appropriate definition in this case? From what sport does it come?
11. What is a synonym for salivating?
12. While you have the thesaurus out, what are seven synonyms for trauma?
13. Break the word "insubordination" into syllables and try to define the parts so that together, they accurately describe the word.

# Answer Sheet: Erica's List — Vocabulary

1. "Flourish" comes from a Latin word meaning to bloom. Why does this make sense?  
**Answer:** Flowers bloom when they open up and stretch wide. That's what the teacher in the story did with his arms — he stretched them open and spread them wide — so the word is appropriate in that sense. A flourish is a gesture of openness that suggests that something is completed successfully. Also, when something grows into its prime, like a flower in blossom, it is said to flourish. The experiment in the story had just reached its full measure and the point was proven, so the word flourish was appropriate again.
2. "Unum" means one. "Animus" means mind. Which word in the story comes from these word parts?  
**Answer:** Unanimous means of one mind.
3. The original literal meaning of the word "profane" is outside the temple. What are profanities and why does this make sense?  
**Answer:** Profanities are words that are spoken against things that are holy. We think of them as obscene words that mock things that are supposed to be viewed as holy. These types of words would never be said inside a place of worship; therefore, they are collectively named as things that would only be said "outside the temple."
4. Are "amending soil" and "amending an opinion" anything alike? Why or why not?  
**Answer:** Yes, they are alike. They both mean to add onto or change. In one case, the soil is being made stronger by changing its nutrients and makeup. Nitrogen or acid might be added to make plants grow better. In the other, the opinion is being made stronger or more clear — new facts might be taken into account that cause it to change.
5. In Middle English, "usher" means door. Why is this appropriate? Make sure your explanation takes into account how the word "ushered" was used in the story.  
**Answer:** "Ushered" in the story refers to a guiding motion: "The teacher guided the student into the office." The role of an usher is to wait at the door and guide people to their seats, so it has an appropriate meaning.
6. Can "acting defiantly" be a good thing? How?  
**Answer:** To be defiant is to be against something. Acting defiantly is acting against something. Yes, that can be a good thing. Bad laws can be defied. Bad actions by a group of people who are pressuring those around them to follow their lead can be defied.
7. Does "glorifies" have a positive or negative connotation? Explain your answer.  
**Answer:** Positive. "Glorifies" contains the base word glory and makes one think of biblical or heroic stories.
8. Belligerent and bellicose are similar words. What is the base of both of them and what does it mean?  
**Answer:** Belli means war. Someone who is bellicose is warlike. Someone who is belligerent is angry and contrary.
9. What is the plural form of stimulus?  
**Answer:** Stimuli.
10. The word "tack" probably made you think of a short pin with a wide head. It doesn't mean that in the story. What is the appropriate definition in this case? From what sport does it come?  
**Answer:** Tack means the act of changing direction quickly to take advantage of the changing winds. It is a nautical term and comes from sailing. (Tack can also come from horse racing since it is a type of equipment in that sport, but it doesn't apply here.) The teacher was changing his direction in the explanation in order to make progress.
11. What is a synonym for salivating?  
**Answer:** Dribbling, slavering, slobbering, dripping, drooling, leaking and oozing are all synonyms of salivating.
12. While you have the thesaurus out, what are seven synonyms for trauma?  
**Answer:** Agony, anguish, collapse, confusion, damage, derangement, disturbance, hurt, injury, jolt, ordeal, outburst, shock, strain, stress, suffering, torture, upheaval, upset and wound are all accepted synonyms.
13. Break the word "insubordination" into syllables and try to define the parts so that together they make sense of the word.  
**Answer:** "In" means "not." "Sub" means below or under. "Ordinate" means to put in proper order. The ending "tion" makes the word a noun. So the word insubordination means the act of not accepting one's proper place in order below whomever is the authority.





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