

Taking Perspectives on Cyberbullying

Essential Question

How does online cruelty affect the people involved?

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Lesson Overview

Students learn about the dynamics of online cruelty and how it affects all the people involved. They begin by exploring a scenario from the TV show *Friday Night Lights*, in which a teen girl creates a hate website about another girl. Students take the perspective of different characters and brainstorm alternative decisions each character could have made. Finally, students discuss what actions they can take when they encounter online cruelty in their own lives, including how to be an upstander. (Note: The term *online cruelty* encompasses what is often referred to as cyberbullying, but it covers a broader range of behaviors and may speak more effectively to teens than the term cyberbullying. We use the term *online cruelty* throughout this lesson.)

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grades 9-10: RI.1, RI.2, RI.3, RI.4, RI.8, RI.10, W.3a, W.3b, W.3c, W.3d, W.3e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.8, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

grades 11-12: RL.1, RL.2, RL.4, RL.7, RL.8, RL.10, RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.10, W.2a, W.3a, W.3b, W.3c, W.3d, W.3e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

NETS•S: 1b, 2a, 2d, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4d, 5a-c

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- articulate why it's important to consider the perspectives of others in online (and offline) communities.
- consider the motivations and feelings of all the parties involved in an incident of online cruelty.
- draw conclusions about how they should respond when someone is the target of online cruelty.

Key Vocabulary –

perspective: the view or outlook of someone, based on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and background


target: a person who is the object of an intentional action

offender: a person who intentionally commits acts to hurt or damage someone

bystander: a person who passively stands by and observes without getting involved

upstander: a person who supports and stands up for someone else

Materials and Preparation

- Copy the **Taking Perspectives Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Review the **Taking Perspectives Student Handout – Teacher Version**.
-  Preview the video “**Friday Night Lights Video Clips**,” and prepare to show it to students. (See note on next page.)

Family Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Note: The “Friday Night Lights Video Clips” video in this lesson portrays a cyberbullying situation. It includes some sexual references, including “whore” and “slut,” and the term “jackass” is used once. If you do not feel comfortable showing this material, describe the scenario and have your class complete the handout based on your description. The use of these clips does not constitute an endorsement of the show.

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **perspective**. Explain to students that in any situation, the people involved generally hold different perspectives, which influence the way they feel about the situation and how they react to it. Students may be familiar with the alternate term point of view, which is often used in relation to literature.

ASK:

Have you ever had a conversation with someone where you had a different point of view? What happened? How did you feel?

Students might note that they may not have realized someone had a different point of view or felt differently about something. Or that hearing a different point of view from another person might be uncomfortable, as we like people to have the same opinions as us. But it could help them understand the other person’s perspective better than before, which can strengthen the relationship or their understanding of the situation.

Why is it important to understand someone else’s perspective?

Understanding someone else’s perspective can help us understand how others feel, help us have empathy for them, and help clear up misunderstandings.

EXPLAIN to students that they will be viewing some video clips that show how different characters react to or think about an incident of online cruelty (cyberbullying).

teach 1

Introduce Characters (10 minutes)

INTRODUCE the class to the TV show *Friday Night Lights*. Explain to the class that the show takes place at Dillon High School, in a fictional small town in Texas, where much of the activity revolves around the school’s football team, the Panthers.

Introduce the class to each of the characters in this story. Write their names on the board.

- **Lyla:** Lyla is head of the cheerleading team at Dillon High School. Her boyfriend was the football team’s quarterback. Recently, she cheated on her boyfriend with another football player named Tim. Her classmates participated in a website that slams Lyla for her behavior.
- **Brittany:** Brittany is Lyla’s alternate on the cheerleading team. She set up a website where she and others at school slam Lyla.
- **Tim:** Tim is a player on the football team. He secretly dated Lyla while she was still seeing the team’s quarterback, who was his friend.

- **Tami:** Tami is the school’s guidance counselor. She often has to intervene in interpersonal conflicts at the school.
- **Ben:** Ben is Brittany’s father.
- **Buddy:** Buddy is Lyla’s father, and he is a successful car dealer in the town of Dillon.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **target**, **offender**, **bystander**, and **upstander**, and write them on the board. Tell students that they will be figuring out who is playing these roles in the clip they’ll view from *Friday Night Lights*.

teach 2

Taking Perspectives (25 minutes)

ARRANGE students into six groups, and assign each group one of the six characters.

DISTRIBUTE the **Taking Perspectives Student Handout**, one per group (or student).

 **SHOW** the “Friday Night Lights Video Clips” video.

INVITE each group to complete their student handout, writing their answers on the back of the handout or on blank paper (each group answers a different set of questions about their assigned character). Have them note any differences in perspectives among members of their group.

ENCOURAGE volunteers from each group to share their responses on the handout with the class. Use the **Taking Perspectives Student Handout – Teacher Version** for guidance with answers.

DISCUSS some or all of the following questions with the class, using them to spark a larger conversation about online cruelty and its consequences. You also can have students discuss in groups.

ASK:

Are actions in an online community (like the slurs on the website) different than actions taken offline (like the notes left on Lyla’s locker at the school)? Why, or why not?

Help students discuss the differences between online and offline cruelty. Online actions can spread easily, can be seen by large audiences, are persistent, and are hard to control. The target can feel more powerless than if the situation is a face-to-face encounter or confined to school.

How are anonymous actions – like posting on a website or leaving a note – different from things done face-to-face?

You may have to define the word *anonymous* as “without any name or identifying information.” Students should discuss how anonymity makes people act in ways they wouldn’t in person. People can hide behind anonymity. Participants in a situation of online cruelty may act differently if they put themselves in the shoes of the target and take the target’s perspective about how they would be affected.

Imagine you were a bystander at this school, watching this situation unfold. What do you think you would have done? Do bystanders have a responsibility to do anything?

Discuss students' responsibilities as digital citizens. Students should be aware that even when they are not directly involved in incidents of online cruelty, they play a role and are accountable for their actions. Most often, they will face a choice between becoming upstanders or remaining bystanders. Encourage students to explain how the choices they make can affect the situation as a whole.

BRAINSTORM ways to be upstanders when it comes to online cruelty. Write answers on the board.

ASK:

How can upstanders help those who face online cruelty? How can they help defuse online cruelty before it escalates?

Students should be aware of the following tips:

- **De-escalate when possible.** If you have good standing with the offender and are comfortable, politely tell the offender to back off.
- **Point out the offender's motivation to the target.** Comfort the target by explaining that many offenders act this way in order to gain control, power, or status.
- **Tell the target you're there for them.** Just by offering a helping hand, you let a target know he or she is not alone and that you're not okay with what's happening.
- **Help the target.** Help the target find friends and school leaders who can help de-escalate the situation.

Note: If a student says that an upstander should retaliate, be violent or hateful, or use online cruelty towards the offender, explain why this is not a good solution. It can escalate the situation and make it worse.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

What should you think about before you post anything about another person online, in an instant message, text, or any other kind of digital message?

Students should recognize the importance of considering other people's perspectives, respecting other people's feelings, and possible outcomes of their actions.

Someone posts a picture of your friend with some nasty comments, and other kids make fun of him or her. What would a bystander do in this situation? What would an upstander do? What would you do?

Students should understand that they are responsible for their actions as members of an online community, and that they can make the important decision to be an upstander rather than a bystander.

Aside from a target, who else can be impacted by online cruelty? Who else could be involved, implicitly or explicitly?

Encourage students to think about the different characters in the “**Friday Night Lights Video Clips.**” Online cruelty can affect family, friends, significant others, and teachers, as well as the dynamic of groups within and outside of schools, like sports teams, neighborhoods, etc.

Taking Perspectives On Cyberbullying

Directions

After watching the “**Friday Night Lights Video Clips**,” take the perspective of one of the characters. First, determine what role your character plays in the situation: **target**, **offender**, **bystander**, or **upstander**. Then use the character quotation and the questions as a guide to help you understand your character’s perspective. For each question, write a paragraph response on the back of this sheet or on blank paper.

Role _____

1. **Lyla:** “*Let them say what they are going to say. And I’ll just tough it out.*”

- What do you think motivates Lyla to visit the website?
How do you think she feels when she sees the site? When she’s taunted at school?
- From Lyla’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?

Role _____

2. **Brittany:** “*Is it wrong that I’m enjoying this?*”

- What do you think motivates Brittany to create the website?
How do you think she felt when she created it?
- From Brittany’s perspective, what outcomes did she expect the website to have?

Role _____

3. **Tim:** “*Let ‘em talk, Lyla. I don’t care.*”

- What do you think motivates Tim to sit down with Lyla in the school cafeteria? How do you think he feels when she tells him he can’t help?
- From Tim’s perspective, what is the impact of the website?

Role _____

4. **Tami:** “*What’s the matter? Well, that’s just bush league.*”

- What do you think motivates Tami to speak with Lyla?
How do you think she felt when she found out about the situation?
- From Tami’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?

Role _____

5. **Ben:** “*I felt like I owed you an apology in person.*”

Lyla doesn’t deserve this, no matter what she did.”

- What do you think motivates Ben to speak with Buddy about the website?
How do you think Ben felt when he talked with Buddy?
- From Ben’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?

Role _____

6. **Buddy:** “*Stuff on the Internet? What are you talking about?*”

- What do you think motivates Buddy to visit the website?
How do you think it made him feel when he saw it?
- From Buddy’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?

Taking Perspectives On Cyberbullying

TAKING PERSPECTIVES
TEACHER VERSION

Directions

After watching the “**Friday Night Lights Video Clips**,” take the perspective of one of the characters. First, determine what role your character plays in the situation: **target**, **offender**, **bystander**, or **upstander**. Then use the character quotation and the questions as a guide to help you understand your character’s perspective. For each question, write a paragraph response on the back of this sheet or on blank paper.

1. Lyla: “*Let them say what they are going to say. And I’ll just tough it out.*” **Role: target**

- *What do you think motivates Lyla to visit the website? How do you think she feels when she sees the site? When she’s taunted at school?*

(We are not sure why Lyla visits the site, but she probably wanted to see what was being said about her. The site made Lyla upset, as she is seen crying in the clip. Being taunted at school upsets Lyla, as she is shown wanting to quit the cheerleading team and sitting alone at lunch.)

- *From Lyla’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?*
(Lyla appears humiliated and feels like her reputation is ruined. She may feel a lack of control about what’s being said by everyone at school, and that she can’t get away from it or stop it. She might feel ashamed because she doesn’t tell her dad about it and avoids telling Tami until Tami confronts her.)

2. Brittany: “*Is it wrong that I’m enjoying this?*” **Role: offender**

- *What do you think motivates Brittany to create the website? How do you think she felt when she created it?*

(Although we aren’t sure exactly what motivates Brittany to make the website, it might be because she is jealous of Lyla, or she wants to damage Lyla’s reputation and social status. Or perhaps she likes Tim or Lyla’s boyfriend. But we do know Brittany’s intention is to hurt Lyla.)

- *From Brittany’s perspective, what outcomes did she expect the website to have?*
(By creating a hate website where anyone can “slam” Lyla, it seems Brittany is trying to hurt Lyla on a public scale and ruin her reputation.)

3. Tim: “*Let ‘em talk, Lyla. I don’t care.*” **Role: bystander**

- *What do you think motivates Tim to sit down with Lyla in the school cafeteria? How do you think he feels when she tells him he can’t help?*

(Tim likely feels guilty about what’s happening to Lyla because he played a part in their relationship. He might feel somewhat at fault, powerless, and angry that he’s not able to help her.)

- *From Tim’s perspective, what is the impact of the website?*
(Tim might be worried about the impact of the site on Lyla and her reputation. He might also be concerned how this situation will affect his relationship with Lyla’s boyfriend on the football team. Additionally, Tim might be worried about the website harming his reputation.)

4. Tami: *“What’s the matter? Well, that’s just bush league.”*

Role: upstander

- *What do you think motivates Tami to speak with Lyla? How do you think she felt when she found out about the situation?*

(As a guidance counselor, Tami is responsible for helping students with their problems and promoting the well-being of students. Tami was probably very concerned about the situation because it involves many students at school – and even parents – and affects the school’s climate and community.)

- *From Tami’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?*

(Tami is likely concerned about the effects of the website on Lyla. Tami might also be worried about law enforcement getting involved, or negative publicity for the school.)

5. Ben: *“I felt like I owed you an apology in person.
Lyla doesn’t deserve this, no matter what she did.”*

Role: bystander

(could also be considered an **upstander** for telling Buddy)

- *What do you think motivates Ben to speak with Buddy about the website? How do you think Ben felt when he talked with Buddy?*

(Ben said that he was apologizing on behalf of his daughter, Brittany. Perhaps Ben is embarrassed at his daughter’s behavior, and feels an obligation to tell Buddy before he finds out another way.)

- *From Ben’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?*

(Ben might be embarrassed at Brittany’s actions and worried about the effect on Lyla, her family, and their reputation.)

6. Buddy: *“Stuff on the Internet?
What are you talking about?”*

Role: bystander

(Buddy is a bystander because although he knows about the site, he does not approach Lyla or try to help her.)

- *What do you think motivates Buddy to visit the website? How do you think it made him feel when he saw it?*

(Buddy was probably curious to know how bad the website was and to determine the possible effects on Lyla. From Buddy’s reaction to the clip, he was upset about the online cruelty towards his daughter. But considering that he didn’t approach Lyla about it, he may have felt powerless to help her, embarrassed to talk to her, or uncertain about what to do.)

- *From Buddy’s perspective, what are the possible consequences of the website?*

(Buddy is likely concerned about the effect the site has on Lyla’s emotional well-being, reputation, and potentially on his family’s reputation, as he’s a well-known car dealer in town.)

Taking Perspectives on Cyberbullying

1. Someone's *perspective* is their outlook, based on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and background. What is another way to say *perspective*?

- a) Point of view
- b) Stereotype
- c) Morals
- d) Race

2. Read the following story. Then use the chart to label the role that each person plays.

Raul is captain of the hockey team. His girlfriend dumps him and starts dating his teammate, Nick. Raul feels that Nick "stole" his girlfriend and decides to get back at him. Raul starts a website where he uploads photos of Nick that show him spray-painting a park bench, which is illegal. Soon, everybody at school knows about Raul's website. Raul's teammate, Andrew, tells him that he should take it down because it's bad for Nick and the whole team.

Who is the target ?	
Who is the upstander ?	
Who is the offender ?	

3. Read the following scenario and then choose the best answer.

Avery and Alannah were competing for the last spot on the soccer team. On the final day of tryouts, Avery stole Alannah's cleats so she couldn't play. Avery ended up getting picked for the team. To get back at Avery, Alannah started a webpage dedicated to hurting Avery.

True or false: This is NOT an example of cyberbullying.

- a) True
- b) False

Taking Perspectives on Cyberbullying and Online Cruelty

1. Someone's *perspective* is their outlook, based on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and background. What is another way to say *perspective*?

- a) Point of view
- b) Stereotype
- c) Morals
- d) Race

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **a**. Understanding that everyone has a different *point of view*, or perspective, might help explain why they act the way they do.

2. Read the following story. Then use the chart to label the role that each person plays.

Raul is captain of the hockey team. His girlfriend dumps him and starts dating his teammate, Nick. Raul feels that Nick “stole” his girlfriend and decides to get back at him. Raul starts a website where he uploads photos of Nick that show him spray-painting a park bench, which is illegal. Soon, everybody at school knows about Raul’s website. Raul’s teammate, Andrew, tells him that he should take it down because it’s bad for Nick and the whole team.

Answer feedback

Who is the target ?	Nick
Who is the upstander ?	Andrew
Who is the offender ?	Raul

3. Read the following scenario and then choose the best answer.

Avery and Alannah were competing for the last spot on the soccer team. On the final day of tryouts, Avery stole Alannah’s cleats so she couldn’t play. Avery ended up getting picked for the team. To get back at Avery, Alannah started a webpage dedicated to hurting Avery.

True or false: This is NOT an example of cyberbullying.

- a) True
- b) False**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**, False. It is never okay to use the Internet to intentionally hurt someone. If someone upsets you, “getting back at them” will only make the situation worse.