

Social and Emotional Learning

Lesson Title: Relational Aggression: Mean Girls/Mean Boys Grade Level: High School

Project and Purpose

Students analyze poetry to identify the signs of relational aggression and create a plan for combatting relational aggression in their own lives.

Essential Question

Why do people participate in relational aggression and what can we do to change it?

Materials

- What Is Relational Aggression? Slide/handout
- Chart paper, 2-3 posted around the room
- Post it notes and writing implements
- Copies of poems about relational aggression (Note: one poem per group of students)
- Relational Aggression Poetry Analysis worksheet

Note: Consider presenting this session with school support staff such as a counselor or a social worker.

Teacher

1. Let students know that they will be talking about a difficult topic today: relational aggression. While individual students may have experience with this topic, they should do their best to refrain from using specific names or using the time to accuse or confess. Explain to students that if they have experienced relational aggression they may find the need to speak with someone. Remind them they can speak to a trusted adult at home or in school or to a school counselor or social worker.
2. Post or handout copies of the slide What Is Relational Aggression? Discuss: what is meant by “covert bullying”? “Manipulating behavior”?
3. Have students silently read the list of tactics used in relational aggression. Ask students to think about times they have noticed, participated in, or been a victim of any of the tactics. They do not need to share this information out loud.
4. Add that RA used to be called “The Mean Girl Phenomenon,” but current research tells us that an equal number of boys participate in and are affected by RE. This may bring up the topic of the movie *Mean Girls* or other like films and pop culture references. Without squelching their participation, point out that those films are indeed examples of RA, but in this session they will not talk about RA as a form of entertainment but rather the serious effects of RA in their lives.

5. Distribute Post-it notes and ask students to write their responses to the following question: What would repeated covert bullying or manipulating behavior cause a victim to feel or do? In other words, what are the effects on a victim of long term relational aggression? Have them post their answers on one of the pieces of chart paper.
6. When students have finished posting their answers, read their responses out loud. Add the following to their list if not included:
 - Low self-esteem
 - Depression
 - Feelings that they are ugly, awkward, unlikeable
 - Hopelessness
 - Isolation/Loneliness
 - Anger
 - Frustration
 - Feelings of rejection
 - Substance abuse
 - Self-injury
 - Eating disorders
 - Sleeping disorders
 - Suicidal thoughts and attempts
 - Delinquency
 - Homicidal thoughts and attempts
 - Academic suffering or failure
 - Stress
 - Anxiety
 - Difficulty making healthy friendships
7. Ask the group to react to this list of effects. Which, if any, are surprising? Which, if any, are upsetting? Which, if any, are familiar? Why?
8. Break into five groups and give each group a copy of one of the poems about relational aggression. Their tasks are:
 - Read the poem silently and then aloud.
 - Determine the speaker (gender identity, age, any other details that would give us a window into the person's character) and cite evidence to support the claim.
 - Determine what relational aggression strategies were used against or by the speaker. Cite evidence to support the claim.
 - Determine the effects of relational aggression on the speaker.
 - Predict what might possibly be the next step for the speaker.
 - What are some helpful, realistic ways other people in this person's life could intervene?
9. Determine the way you would like students to share their poems and responses.

Conclusion

Many times people participate in relational aggression because they have never stopped to take other people's feelings into account either in person or online. Ask students to respond to the following questions as a journal entry or a personal written response: What part do you play in relational aggression in your school? How can you be a part of the solution?

What is Relational Aggression?

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, relational aggression is “harm within relationships that is caused by covert bullying or manipulating behavior.”

While the tactics used in relational aggression vary, here are some common behaviors to look out for:

- talking badly about others
- spreading rumors or engaging in gossip
- attacking someone’s reputation
- backstabbing one another
- making fun of others for who they are, the way they dress or how they look
- excluding people from a group; ostracizing others
- leaving hurtful or mean or threatening messages on cell phones, social media, desks, lockers, and any other personal possessions
- cyberbullying or shaming others online
- intimidating others
- using peer pressure to get others to participate in bullying; recruiting others to dislike a target
- establishing rules for anyone who wants to be part of the social group
- forming cliques
- breaking confidences or sharing others’ secrets
- taking false credit for work of others
- discrediting someone else’s work

Activity: Relational Aggression Poetry Analysis

Grade Level: High School

Name _____ Poem Title _____

Question	Group's Response	Evidence from Poem
<p>Determine the speaker (gender identity, age, any other details that would give us a window into the person's character) and cite evidence to support the claim.</p>		
<p>Determine what relational aggression strategies were used against or by the speaker. Cite evidence to support the claim.</p>		
<p>Determine the effects of relational aggression on the speaker.</p>		
<p>Predict what might possibly be the next step for the speaker.</p>		
<p>What are some realistic ways other people in this person's peer group could intervene?</p>		

Handout: Poems

Take Me Down, by Aliza Sherman

You've always been there, even in
Kindergarten, pushing my face into
a can of worms on the playground.
In grade school, calling me a witch
and telling me you'll burn me
at the stake at recess.
In middle school, you didn't want to
be my friend, you said I was weird,
too smart, too serious.
High school moments of pure hell,
of National Honor Society,
leads in school plays. Kisses of death.
In college, I kept to myself,
stayed clear of your jealousy,
alone with my own self-loathing.
In the real world, at every job,
you've always gone out of your way
to hurt me.

The Friend Who Means Least, By Timothy Langley

Don't worry accidents happen.
This isn't the first time I've been forgotten.
There has to be a friend who means least,
and in our little group I guess that's me.
I love spending time with you
I really, really do,
but don't feel bad whenever you forget me,
because that's just what I'm used to.

Just please don't forget my invite
to your party tomorrow night.
You brought it up in front of me, seconds ago.
Yet it looks like your leaving me alone.
But I know you're just forgetting me.
At least I hope your only forgetting me.
I hope I'm not being excluded.
But when they leave I'm still uninvited.

Oh well. It hurts a lot,
but I'm used to it.

How does it feel to be left out? By celi

People you like don't say hello
Your mood is lower than low
Your friends talk about stuff you don't know
Telling secrets they don't want to show
Making you feel jealous of all this
Being angry of everything you miss
You never go out with friends on Saturday night
"They left without me," you think with fright.

You never run out of tears to shed,
Often wonder what it's like to be dead
You're lying awake all night in your bed
But deep inside you don't want life to end.

You think of the "f" word,
Everything's ruining your world
You feel so alone in the crowd
And everything's getting so loud
You just feel so left out
You never know what people are talking about
You're so lonely, you have no one to talk to
You're so lonely, you don't know how to make it
through...

If you can place yourself in at least one of these
positions,
Then you know how it feels to be left out.
And even if all these are my own creations and
fictions,
These are the words I'd love to shout...

Handout: Poems

Nobody's Friend

Anonymous

My name is gossip.
I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing.
I break hearts and ruin lives.
I am cunning and malicious and gather
strength with age.
The more I am quoted the more I am believed.
I flourish at every level of society.
My victims are helpless.
They cannot protect themselves against me
because I have no name and no face.
To track me down is impossible for you.
The harder you try, the more elusive I become.
I am nobody's friend.
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
I topple governments and wreck marriages.
I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights,
heartache and indigestion.
I spawn suspicion and generate grief.
I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
Even my name hisses.
I am called Gossip.
Office gossip.
Shop gossip.
Party gossip.
Telephone gossip.
I make headlines and headaches.
Before you repeat a story ask yourself:
Is it true?
Is it fair?
Is it necessary?
If not — KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!

Mean Girls

By Stephen (Sometimes Stephanie) Burt
after Baudelaire

In twos and threes on bedspreads the color of sand
Anywhere in suburban America they turn
Their parallel painted toes to the horizon
Finding a target almost without knowing it Hand

On hand together as on a hand-drawn
Ouija board they select
A number to dial a name to call and deflect
The reputation that would land on them

They betray their confidences with confidence
Some of them used to walk through the last wild stand
Of maples behind the cul-de-sac snapping the saplings
Calling each other crybabies they mock experience

And mock my lack of experience
Their net composed of telephone cords
Night after night brings up ghosts
Lantern fish and anglerfish with their intense

Lures are not more fit
For such secretive nights such high-pressure environments
Such canticles of devotion to amoral gods
Some of them open the liquor cabinet

In an otherwise empty household and discover
The pleasure of Limoncello and headachy sleep
Some of them mock you for paying
Too much for a sparkly tunic or for looking cheap

They say your black bracelets and grave
Demeanor augur solitary nights
But your slutty hoop earrings must hurt You liked
The right boys but in the wrong order You called it a rave

But it was not a rave You are too good
An accessory kiss-off show-off You disgust
Our modesty You have nothing to show They place air quotes
Around your life so you learn not to trust
Yourself any more than they trust
One another because you still crave
Their pathetic and fleeting attention O monstrous martyrs
With your emerald contact lenses O terrible saints
Of hypocrisy penlites and brave
Cursive in sealed envelopes You understand

How some of us you reject will never forget you
We will grow up to study your mistakes
As means of navigation You wanted to keep
Us from becoming like you but we will not let you