

Discussion Guide

Bystander by James Preller

1. The ending of the book does not provide a typical Hollywood conclusion, where it's all wrapped up. Instead, it strives for something more realistic. What do they will happen with the characters in the future, particularly Griffin and his friends. What clues in the text support your conclusion?
2. In the character of David Hallenback, we see a victim/target who turns around to become a bully against Eric Hayes. Research shows this to be a common dynamic -- that the target becomes the bully. Why do you think this might be true?
3. From the book, we learn that Mary has been involved in some cyber-bullying the past. Why do you think this particular form of bullying --- creating a web page, or simply send a mean email -- is on the rise today? What makes it easier? Why?
4. Think about Eric's mother's actions and reactions in the book. Do you think she made any mistakes? What did she do right? What would you want to tell adults about the "real" stories behind bullying?
5. In chapter 20, a gathered group of boys discuss their responses to Griffin's behavior. A number of reasons are listed by various characters as to why they elect to do nothing, including: 1) The unreliability of authority figures to respond; 2) The threat of retaliation; 3) That the victim, at least on some level, deserves it; 4) That it's human nature, the law of the jungle, and will always persist; 5) That it's better to stay out of it; and lastly, 6) That no one should "rat out" another student. Are any of these valid reasons for remaining a bystander? Why and why not?
6. Griffin Connelly is represented as a smart, good-looking, intelligent boy. Why do you think he's involved in bully behaviors? What traits do you think he might lack?
7. Eric's father is absent from the story, living miles away. What effect do you think this had on Eric? Do you feel it helped make him a potential target in Griffin's eyes?
8. In what is known as "the bystander effect," it's been learned that group behavior is often less moral/ethical than individual behavior. For example, imagine a figure laying on the sidewalk. Groups of people have, in various tests, failed to stop and help the injured person. Yet individuals -- alone -- are much more likely to stop and try to be of assistance. Why do you think that is so?
9. To what extent is it fair to blame some of David Hallenback's problems on himself? What mistakes does he make? Are there things he might have done differently? Did he in any way bring these problems unto himself?

10. Do you feel the school authorities -- ranging from the principal, teachers, counselors and school resource officer -- acted appropriately throughout? Could they have done more to address the problem?