

Justice/Fairness

Grades 9-12

Segment Summary:

Even though Robert Layde and David Mullinax were both victims of unfair treatment, Robert took his anger and frustration out on other people while David went beyond mere fairness to demonstrate empathy for his tormentors.

Robert Layde was a bully, and he would do what he could to make other kids feel uncomfortable, including becoming violent. He says that bullies have low self-esteem and that no “ordinary” person would grow up to be a bully. In fact, Robert’s life has been far from ordinary. His mother and her boyfriend abused drugs and beat both Robert and his 3-year-old sister. And when he was a child, they sometimes gave him drugs so that he’d get high, and then they would laugh at him. For them, it was a game, one that Robert had little chance of winning. The years of pain his mother and her boyfriend inflicted on him took their toll, causing Robert to model their behavior by hurting those around him. The cycle of violence finally peaked when Robert, then 13 years old, was arrested for being violent toward his younger sister. He says he should have received counseling; instead, the young teen was put in jail.

If Robert is the typical bully, then David Mullinax is the typical victim. David was picked on for not fighting back when provoked, and his classmates pigeonholed him as a victim. Instead, he would report each incident to the principal, which made the situation worse. But instead of acting out his anger on someone younger and smaller, David tried a different strategy. Over the course of several months, he and the boys who tormented him got to know each other. David even acted as a pseudo therapist, helping his former bullies cope with issues not unlike Robert’s. David had a different idea of what was fair than most of us. His ability to keep an open mind and help his tormentors, rather than having zero tolerance for the bullies’ actions no matter what their motives, illustrates his determination to lead a just and fair life.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be just and fair?
2. Because Robert was abused as a child, do you think he should have received counseling instead of a jail sentence? Why or why not?
3. What do you think motivated Robert’s mother and her boyfriend to give Robert drugs as a child?
4. Was it just for Robert to physically abuse his little sister just because his mother abused him?
5. What alternative methods should Robert have used in coping with the physical abuse of his mother and her boyfriend?
6. Do Robert and David have anything in common? How are they different?
7. After David reported to his principal that he was being harassed, what moral or legal obligation did the principal have to help David?
8. How was David pigeonholed as a victim?
9. Sometimes there is a difference in what people perceive to be fair and what is actually right. How did David illustrate this difference?
10. Have you ever been involved in a situation where someone was being harassed at school, at home, in your community, etc.? Did you feel you had an obligation to help?
11. Is it fair to ask others to put themselves in danger in order to help someone else?
12. Do you think the victim of harassment or a violent act should have a say as to how the person charged is punished?

Vocabulary Words and Definitions:

Capital punishment (n.)

Definition: the act of legally killing someone for a crime after he or she has been found guilty in a court of law **Context:** Many states often use capital punishment in the case of a person who intentionally kills another.

Fairness (n.)

Definition: the quality of treating everyone equally

Context: In fairness to the students without computers, Mr. Sand did not require the term papers to be typed.

First Amendment (n.)

Definition: the part of the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion, speech, assembly, petition and the press

Context: Garrett claims the school board denied him his First Amendment right to freedom of speech by censoring his editorial in the school newspaper.

Harass (v.)

Definition: to annoy or threaten someone again and again

Context: Judith and Reynaldo threatened to harass Amy if she told the teacher she saw them cheating.

Inequitable (adj.)

Definition: not equally fair to everyone; unjust

Context: There is an inequitable distribution of wealth in most countries.

Judgment (n.)

Definition: an opinion that you form, especially after careful thought

Context: Against his better judgment, Damien allowed his girlfriend to copy the answers off of his test.

Justice (n.)

Definition: fairness in the way people are treated

Context: Children have a strong sense of justice, often treating their peers fairly.

Obstacle (n.)

Definition: that which stands in the way or opposes; anything that hinders progress; a hindrance

Context: The only obstacle preventing Francis from completing the course was her failure to finish the research paper on time.

Pigeonhole (v.)

Definition: to decide unfairly that a person, activity, etc., belongs to a particular type or group; to stereotype **Context:**

Although he excels in all of his classes, Marco's classmates pigeonhole him as a mediocre student because he plays football.

Self-concept (n.)

Definition: the mental image a person has of himself or herself

Context: Sid's negative self-concept is directly related to his inability to lose weight.

Stereotype (n.)

Definition: an idea of what a particular group of people is like, especially one that is wrong or unfair

Context: Because she is often quiet, people assume Danielle fits the stereotype of a shy student.

Zero tolerance (n.)

Definition: a way of dealing with crime in which every person who breaks the law (or rule), even in a very small way, is punished as severely as possible

Context: The school board has zero tolerance for students who bring drugs to school.

Source: *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 2000.

Activity: Zeroing In on Tolerance

Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Identify zero-tolerance policies and how they affect outcomes
- Discuss views of fairness concerning zero-tolerance policies
- Use appropriate research tools
- Collaborate with others to solve problems
- Evaluate current zero-tolerance policies

Materials:

- Pens, pencils
- Paper
- Research tools (Internet, magazines, newspaper)

Procedure:

1. Initiate a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What does zero tolerance mean to you?
 - If cases were viewed individually, how could you insure that judicial officials would be fair and objective in each case?
 - Do you think favoritism and discrimination sometimes play a role when authorities are assigning punishment? Would zero-tolerance policies prevent this practice from occurring?
 - What experiences have you had that reflect unfair punishment or injustice?
2. Divide the class into groups of two or three students.
3. Have each group research to find an article concerning zero-tolerance policies, and instruct groups to discuss whether or not the punishment was fair in each situation. Students should indicate whether or not they would change the punishment and how they would change it. Then instruct each group to present its article to the class.
4. Conclude with a class discussion. Consider the following questions:
 - Why do you think people institute zero-tolerance policies? Are these policies effective?
 - Do you think zero tolerance leads to quick judgment without taking into consideration all of the circumstances?
 - Do you think treating everyone the same is the fair way to handle situations?
 - What is the relationship between zero tolerance and capital punishment?
 - What are some alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that may be more fair?

Justice/Fairness Student Evaluation Form

Presenter's Name:		Course/Period:		
Preparation	Rating			Total
Information was well-organized	1	2	3	
Main points were clear	1	2	3	
Each main point was supported by facts or statistics	1	2	3	
All important information was included	1	2	3	
Composure				
Presenter used appropriate gestures throughout the presentation	1	2	3	
Presenter made eye contact while speaking	1	2	3	
Presenter's attitude matched the seriousness of the topic	1	2	3	
Presenter spoke clearly throughout the presentation	1	2	3	
Group Evaluation (if applicable)				
The group seemed fairly cohesive and everyone contributed equally	1	2	3	
TOTAL POINTS EARNED				

Positive feedback:

- What was the most positive part of this presentation?
- What is one new idea you have learned from this presentation?

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