



## **Bullies Rule**

Monique Polak

Reading level: 4.5  
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### **Book Summary**

Daniel Abel is surprised when, instead of being punished for “pantsing” another eighth-grader, he is invited to become an ambassador of Mountview High at the school’s upcoming open house. What he doesn’t realize is that he is part of a social experiment on bullying being conducted by the local university.

He is a little nervous to learn he will be working with Jeff Kover, a tenth-grader with a reputation for being the biggest bully in the school. Daniel has never thought of himself as a bully. He just likes kidding around. But hanging out with Jeff will change Daniel’s perspective on bullying and force him to examine his own behavior.

### **Author Biography**

**Monique Polak** has written many novels for young adults, including her historical novel, *What World Is Left*, which won the 2009 Québec Writers’ Federation Prize for Children’s and Young Adult Literature. When not writing award-winning books, Monique teaches English and Humanities in Montréal, Québec, where she also works as a freelance journalist.

## Connecting to the Text

### *Character Study*

There are various examples of Daniel bullying others in *Bullies Rule*. Interestingly, he doesn't see himself as a bully. When Abby tells Daniel he is a bully, just like Tanya, he says, "Calling me a bully—that isn't right... I'm not a bully. Not like Jeff Kover" (ch. 7). To engage students with the characters in the novel, use the following as large group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises.

- In Daniel's mind, how is Jeff's behavior different than his own? Why does he see Jeff as a bully, but not himself?
- Daniel says what he did to Nelson, Jason and Ronnie was "only kidding around." Do you agree? Why, or why not? How do other kids perceive Daniel's kidding?
- What did it take for Daniel to change his thinking?

### *Creative Writing Exercises*

1. After the events at the Open House, Daniel was interviewed for an article in the community paper (ch. 16). Ask students to break into groups of two or three and write articles of their own, debriefing the night from the different characters' points of view. Steps could include:
  - ♦ Prepare questions for the interviewer to ask (covering *what, where, when, why, how*).
  - ♦ Draft answers in the voice of either Daniel, Jeff, Tanya, Ms. Fornello or Nelson.
  - ♦ Write an article, summarizing the events and the interviewee's unique point of view.
  - ♦ Share the articles in the large group. How is each similar, and different?
2. Ask students to reflect on Ms. Fornello's "experiment," as explained in chapter 16. She suggested that some bullies, if given status positions, would "rise to the occasion."
  - ♦ Does the experiment ring true for you? In your experience, would a kid like Daniel come to realize that he should help people instead of bullying them?
  - ♦ In the auditorium, Jeff said, "I feel grateful. And I haven't always been the grateful type." How do you think Jeff will behave toward the other kids from now on?
  - ♦ Daniel and Jeff were invited to become spokespersons, to spread the word that change is possible. Imagine it's a year in the future and they are visiting other schools where bullying is a big problem. Write a speech that either Daniel or Jeff could deliver.

### *The Writer's Craft*

Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us "pictures" that enrich our understanding of scenes and characters. Read the scene in chapter 6 where Tanya and her sidekicks block the traffic in front of the library. It begins, *I know they are waiting for a victim, the way a spider waits in its web for dinner*. Ask students to highlight examples of simile and phrases that extend the metaphor. Can you "see" the image Monique Polak has created?

**Theme**

Theme, the broad idea of the story, can sometimes be revealed in the lessons learned by the characters. Invite students to brainstorm the lessons learned by Daniel in *Bullies Rule*. Topics for group discussion or individual reflection include:

- *How we use words*: Miss Thompson says it's one of the things that make us human: "We can use language to hurt others...or to try to make the world a better place" (ch. 8). Early in the novel, how does Daniel use words to hurt others, and later, to help? How does Daniel feel when he's called a "nice young man" at the flu clinic? (ch. 9).
- *Joking around-bullying*: Daniel says he's just joking when he embarrasses or teases others. He's not a bully like Jeff or a mean girl like Tanya. Consider the scene in chapter 14 when Daniel says, "Did I really think this was fun? Because I've changed my mind." What changed for him?
- *Personal power*: Jeff, Tanya and Daniel all hold power over others. Their power comes from fear and intimidation—kids are scared of them. What does Daniel learn about his influence/power over others? Recall that Daniel said, "that fear makes me feel powerful—but also guilty" (ch. 13).
- *Responsibility*: Daniel learns that some kids bully because they're bullied at home. Daniel observes Jeff's Dad and decides he's "nasty." Does having a mean dad excuse Jeff? Consider: when Daniel is talking with Theo at the helpline, Theo asks, "Do you really think someone can *make* you do something bad?" (ch. 11).

**Building Vocabulary**

The following words are used in the novel in the context of bullying.

|            |           |             |            |
|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| ambassador | confident | humiliation | punishment |
| apologize  | empathy   | nervous     | scared     |
| bullying   | hotline   | opinion     | victim     |

Invite students to choose from the ideas below, incorporating 3 or 4 of the vocabulary words into their responses.

- Write a letter from Daniel to a friend who lives in another state or province. Explain what happened at school, and how Daniel came to turn over a new leaf.
- Imagine Daniel and Abby become friends, and she asks him what happened to change him from a bully into an anti-bullying spokesperson. How does Daniel respond?
- Pretend you're Nelson and you're describing what happened at the Open House. Has your opinion of Daniel changed? Will you ever be friends?
- Daniel is now an anti-bullying spokesperson, and he's telling kids about his experience, and how he grew and changed. What is his story?

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *School Pride*

In chapter 10, Daniel and Jeff get an orientation to prepare them to be ambassadors for Mountview High. They must share with visitors what makes Mountview High special. Ask students to list four things that make their own school or learning environment special. If you were an ambassador, what would *your* talking points be?

### *Life Skills*

1. Daniel likes having an audience and getting attention by “joking around,” always at someone else’s emotional and social expense. He’s proud of how well he can lie and his level of confidence. What could Daniel do in school or his community, rather than bully?
  - ♦ What could he do to express himself and get attention?  
**Prompts:** join drama club, take an improv class, perform at poetry slams, storytelling.
  - ♦ What could he do to be a leader and help others?  
**Prompts:** learn first aid, help at the hotline, be an anti-bullying spokesperson.
2. Ms. Fornello, the guidance counselor, tells Daniel he lacks empathy. Lead a discussion on empathy. After reaching consensus on a definition, engage students in committing to practicing empathy in your classroom or learning environment.
  - ♦ Discuss: As a class, what is a definition of empathy we can all understand? Do we need to be face-to-face to show empathy, or could we do it online too?  
(e.g., *Empathy is being able to put yourself in another person’s shoes and understand what they could be experiencing and feeling.*)
  - ♦ Ask students to each contribute one behavior that demonstrates empathy.  
(e.g., *Empathy is helping a new kid who is lost find their class. This is empathy because I can imagine what it feels like to be the new kid; you might feel shy or embarrassed.*)
  - ♦ Ask students to find an example of empathy demonstrated in the novel.  
**Prompt:** Daniel’s opinion of Jeff changed after he saw Jeff and his dad at Handy Hardware.
  - ♦ How does practicing empathy make it less likely for someone to bully others?

### *Art*

Invite students to choose a quote that captures a key theme from the novel (examples below). Incorporate a quote into an art project which illustrates the theme, connecting it to the novel. What colors, images and textures will “fit” the theme?

- ch. 11 *I’m usually just kidding around, but I guess sometimes I end up hurting people.*  
 ch. 11 *Do you really think someone can make you do something bad?*  
 ch. 12 *I’m trying to turn over a new leaf.*  
 ch. 13 *Would I do something else to humiliate Nelson? Is it worth a laugh?*  
 ch. 16 *I guess I discovered something...pretty important. That it feels good to be in charge sometimes and to be able to help other kids.*

**Connecting to the Students**

1. Various bullying behaviors can be found in *Bullies Rule*. Lead a discussion about bullying and the different forms it can take. According to [erasebullying.ca](http://erasebullying.ca), bullying is a pattern of unwelcome or aggressive behavior, often with the goal of making others uncomfortable, scared or hurt. Using topics below, invite students to find out more.
  - ♦ There are four kinds of bullying: physical, verbal, social and emotional, and cyber-bullying. Define each, providing examples from the novel.  
**Prompts:** Daniel “pantsed” Nelson, shaming him in front of others, and Luke recorded it on video. Tanya, Evie and Lily teased and tripped Abby. Daniel imitated Jason missing a basket, teased Ronnie about his acne, and called Abby names.
  - ♦ What is your school’s policy on bullying? Where is it available for students and parents? After reading *Bullies Rule*, does the policy now have a deeper meaning?
  - ♦ How far is “too far” when it comes to bullying, or is zero tolerance the solution?
2. In chapter 7, Daniel grabs a pamphlet with an anti-bullying hotline on it. He doesn’t realize that the anti-bullying hotline isn’t just for victims: People who bully others, or are witnesses to bullying, can also get help. Ask students to research the following:
  - ♦ Find anti-bullying resources that kids in your school can use, and distribute them where they can be easily accessed. What are good places? (e.g., on the school website or on other social media platforms, in washroom stalls, in the cafeteria, on each seat on the bus, etc.)
  - ♦ Find a hotline that students in your school can access, such as the Kids Helpline. Talk about what to expect when calling a hotline.

**Web Resources**

*Bullies Rule* was inspired by researchers at Simon Fraser University. The following article outlines key aspects and findings of the 2015 study: [www.bullyingcanada.ca/news/provocative-new-study-finds-bullies-have-highest-self-esteem-social-status-lowest-rates-of-depression](http://www.bullyingcanada.ca/news/provocative-new-study-finds-bullies-have-highest-self-esteem-social-status-lowest-rates-of-depression).