

# Innocence in an age of Infamy

## Lesson 9:                      **Taking Action!**

**Grades 7-12**

### **Objectives:**

- Students will apply what they have learned about conflict and problem-solving while studying World War II to promoting tolerance and improving school climate.

### **Procedure for Classroom Activity:**

1. Begin the lesson by acknowledging that serious problems, like the Holocaust during World War II, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, genocide in Rwanda, and terrorism can often seem too difficult and remote for students to truly understand and imagine how they could help prevent such problems in the future. Announce that today's lesson will focus on similar serious problems that have gained attention because of the recent shootings at American schools like Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and Springfield High School in Springfield, Oregon.
2. Read the following statement made by a student from Columbine High School after he watched one of the videotapes of the student gunmen, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who on April 20, 1999 wounded 26 students and killed 12 students and a teacher before committing suicide:

“Sure we teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? It's not just jocks; the whole school's disgusted with them ... If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease 'em.”

Lead the students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- According to this student, who were the “winners” and “losers” at Columbine High School? On what basis was this decided?
- How do you think the teasing and name-calling affected Harris and Klebold? How do teasing and name-calling affect students at

your school?

- What other examples of destructive student behavior have you observed in schools? (i.e., bullying, taunts, rejection, put-downs, teasing, name-calling, sarcasm, sneering, ostracism, jeering, etc.)
- How common are these kinds of actions in schools?

3. Expand the discussion by sharing the following statistics with the students:

- 1 out of 5 adolescents in the U.S. has seriously considered suicide.
- 1 out of 10 has attempted suicide. (1999)

Ask students why they think these statistics are so high in the U.S. Do students think there is any relationship between the negative behaviors (name-calling, teasing, etc.) discussed earlier and teen suicide? Why or why not?

4. The big question follows naturally, “Is there anything that can be done to improve the climate in schools to make these behaviors less frequent?” Divide the class into groups of four to five students to discuss this question and brainstorm possible solutions to this problem. Ask each group to select one of their brainstormed solutions and develop a proposal for an Action Plan that includes the following:

- What is the problem that you want to solve?
- What are the reasons why this problem needs to be solved?
- Outline the method your group thinks will work to solve this problem. (Include the steps you propose be taken, by whom, when, where, how, and why.)
- Explain why you think this method will work to help solve the problem.
- What evaluation plan will you use to make sure that your method is working?

5. Share the group Action Plans with the entire class. If desired, select one or more to put into action at your school.

### **Assessment Suggestions:**

1. Write an editorial for your school newspaper outlining your Action Plan and why you believe it should be implemented as part of school policy.

**Extension Ideas:**

1. Conduct a survey at your school to determine the prevalence of name-calling, bullying, and other negative behaviors. Compare the survey results to the prevalence of negative behaviors after your Action Plan has been tried. Evaluate if the plan was successful, and make recommendations about how it might be modified to make it even more successful.
2. Research gangs to find out why young people join them. What measures are being tried in your community to combat them? Do you think these measures are successful or not?