

Bitopia Discussion Guide

The objective of this guide is to allow a teacher or other discussion leader to conduct a chronological review of *Bitopia* with an emphasis on those parts related to bullying. The goal of the review is to ensure that the lessons related to bullying the novel tries to convey are clearly understood by the students. Bullying facts are provided with the questions to provide additional information. The facts are denoted by a ⊕ symbol. The last section of the document contains just the questions in case the discussion leader would like the students to review them in advance. More detailed information on bullying can be found in the guide *Understanding Bullying and Ways to Make It STOP!*

Bitopia Synopsis

A synopsis of the story is presented here as a refresher for the teacher.

STEWART, the new sixth grader at Oak Hill School, is picked on daily by DIRK, JUDD, and FRANKIE. While trying to escape from them one day after school, Stewart hides in an open storm drain at a construction site. Wandering through the maze of drainpipes under the streets to find another way out, he emerges into what he thinks must be a botanical garden due to the lush vegetation and swaths of forests around him. He meets CORA, who offers to lead him back to his neighborhood but instead brings him to a foreboding walled city. Stewart refuses to go in, but when hideous VENATORS appear, he quickly follows her inside.

The city is primitive, with stone and thatch houses and no electricity or running water. Cora assures Stewart that their leader will explain everything. Expecting an adult who can help to get him home, Stewart is shocked to find that the leader, PRINCEPS EVELYN, is a girl his own age. The Princeps explains that, like all the other children in the city, Stewart took a one-way portal to the land, called Bitopia, which is not on Earth, while trying to hide from his tormentors. Time passes but no one ages, and they have no idea how to get home. Worst of all, a cryptic passage referred to as the “Third Prophecy” in a sacred book, the *Comlat*, which was left behind by the prior occupants of the city, the Forebears, foretells the children’s eventual annihilation at the hands of the Venators.

Desperate to get home, Stewart discovers evidence that suggests the Forebears weren’t annihilated. He asks to review the text of the Third Prophecy, believing that the children have misinterpreted it, but the Princeps refuses; the “evidence” that Stewart has discovered is already known to them. And since the *Comlat* contains detailed information on how to survive in Bitopia, no one except for the Princeps is allowed to touch the book. Before Stewart can think of another way to confirm his belief that the text has been misinterpreted, the Venators lay siege to the city, which appears to validate the Third Prophecy.

Still convinced that the prior occupants of the city defeated the Venators, Stewart and Cora break into the Vault, which houses and protects the *Comlat*. They are caught, but during their trial, they discover a map hidden within the pages, which Stewart guesses will lead to some kind of weapon that the Forebears used in their battle with the Venators.

Exiled from the city for touching the *Comlat*, Stewart and Cora have no choice but to follow the route of the map. They meet an enormous WOLF, one of the many denizens of Bitopia. Stewart

is frightened, but Cora knows the wolf can talk and explains their quest. The wolf agrees to let them pass after first helping them realize that Stewart’s fear gave the wolf power over him, and, similarly, the children’s fear gives the Venators their power. The children can drive away the Venators simply by not being afraid. The wolf also reveals that he, not some weapon, is the object of their search and that he passed along the same knowledge to the Forebears.

Stewart and Cora race back to the city. Stewart makes it back inside, but Cora is caught by a gang of enraged Venators. Saddened by her presumed demise, Stewart finds that the citizens are desperately building a stone wall across the gate to prevent the Venators from entering. Stewart realizes that hiding in the city from the Venators is the exact same behavior that caused each child to wind up in Bitopia in the first place. Stewart tells the citizens that they already lost one world—home—by refusing to face what they feared and that by sealing themselves permanently in the city to again avoid what they fear, they would forever lose a second world as well—the beautiful land of Bitopia.

Realizing that Stewart is right, the citizens tear down the wall. The Venators burst through the gate and a melee ensues. But the children stand their ground, and the Venators, seeing that their torments are having no effect, grow confused and stop. As the citizens lose their fear of the Venators, the Venators, which are actually the embodiment of the citizens’ fear, slowly fade and disappear. The citizens walk out the gate, free at last, and discover that not only did Cora survive, but the portals home have reappeared. The key to getting home, they finally understand, was to face their fears.

When Stewart gets home, he finds that no time has passed. As he was escaping from Dirk, Judd, and Frankie when he passed through the portal—the storm drain—his reentry into his own world puts him right into their hands. But when Stewart practices what the wolf told him, to show no fear, they grow frustrated that their torments have no apparent effect, and they eventually leave Stewart alone.

Discussion Icebreakers

The following questions are intended to help start the discussion.

1. Who was your favorite character in the story?
2. Did you find any parts of the story to be funny? Scary?
3. Who do you think is the bravest person in the story and why?
4. If you were trapped in Bitopia, living with the children in the city, what role would you choose and why? Can you think of other roles that would be useful?

Bitopia Questions and Bullying Facts

Part 1: The Story Opening—Running from Dirk, Judd, and Frankie

1. **How does the story open?** Stewart, a new sixth-grade student at Oak Hill School, is running through his neighborhood in an attempt to get home while avoiding three eighth-grade students, Dirk, Judd, and Frankie, who torment him.

- ⊛ Bullying is repeated behavior that negatively affects another person, such as making the person feel scared, upset, badly about him or herself, or isolated from losing friends. Bullying behavior includes physical aggression such as intimidation, scaring, threatening, shoving, and punching; verbal aggression such as name calling, insulting, and saying other mean things; and harming friendships and relationships with others by gossiping, starting rumors, forming a group to exclude a person, whispering while pointing, betrayal, and secret petitions.
2. **Why do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie pick on Stewart?** There can be many possible answers as each student could perceive some characteristic of Stewart as being the justification for the bullying. However, the text suggests two reasons: 1. Stewart is a new student at the Oak Hill School; 2. Stewart is, on average, smaller than other boys his age.
 - ⊛ Aggressors frequently use a characteristic of a person as justification for bullying. The aggressor will often refer to a physical aspect of the person—body shape, size, or feature—or other aspects such as race, nationality, religion, or being the new kid at school, in the course of the bullying. Victims of bullying tend to start thinking of this characteristic as a flaw. It is important to remember that these characteristics are just characteristics, not flaws, and are an excuse by the aggressor to use bullying behavior.
 3. **Are being smaller than average and new to school reasons to bully another person?** No. There are actually no good reasons for bullying.
 4. **How do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie make Stewart feel?** Stewart feels scared and anxious.
 5. **Do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie intend serious harm to Stewart?** No. They have ample opportunity to hurt him, but their primary goal is simply to torment him.
 - ⊛ People who bully using physical aggression rarely intend serious harm. Instead, they use physical actions or intimidation to instill fear.
 6. **Are the aggressors (a preferable term to “bullies”) actually chasing after Stewart?** While it may seem that the aggressors are after Stewart, they aren’t really chasing after him. They only torment him when they happen to come upon him. This form of bullying is called “opportunistic.” In a sense, the aggressors chase Stewart because he runs from them. A person who doesn’t run can’t be chased.
 - ⊛ When bullying occurs for no particular reason, it is called “opportunistic.” An aggressor will direct his or her behavior at anyone who can be negatively affected by it. The other kind of bullying is called “retaliatory.” This form of bullying is motivated by a feeling on the part of the aggressor of having been insulted or harmed in some way by the target and a desire to get revenge or justice by bullying the victim.
 - ⊛ The term “bully” is a label and is dehumanizing. It describes the aggressive behavior of a person but not other aspects of that person. A better term to use is “aggressor,” as it objectively describes the behavior of the person.
 7. **Do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie enjoy tormenting Stewart?** Yes, they do get pleasure from it. It makes them feel dominant to Stewart, like they have power over him, and it gives them a boost of self-esteem.
 - ⊛ People bully for many reasons, but most especially: 1. to get a feeling of power over another person; 2. to get back at a person for an actual or perceived offense; 3. to feel better about

themselves and help boost their own self-esteem; 4. to get what they want; 5. for enjoyment—for fun and to make others laugh, which provides a feeling of superiority; 6. to maintain or enhance their position in a social hierarchy.

8. **What does the bullying of Stewart prevent him from doing?** He is unable to make friends on the playground or after school. He does not enjoy his walks home.

Part 2: In Bitopia

1. **Can you describe Bitopia?** Bitopia is a fantastical land with beautiful and colorful vegetation and very large animals. It is a lush paradise.
2. **Why do the children of Bitopia hide within the walled city?** Creatures called Venators prowl the land and hunt the children. The children are scared of the Venators and use the walled city for protection.
 - ⊕ A target is someone at whom bullying behavior is directed. A victim is a target of bullying behavior who is affected by the bullying. All the children in Bitopia at the start of the story are bullying victims. In the type of aggression (dominance) described in the story, it is not the aggressor who determines whether the bullying behavior is effective but rather the target of that behavior. If the target of the bullying behavior is negatively affected by the behavior, the bullying is effective. If the target is not negatively affected, the bullying behavior is not affected.
3. **Are the children able to enjoy this beautiful land around them?** No, they want to stay within the city walls because of the Venators.
 - ⊕ Bullying victims will often change their behavior—such as avoiding certain routes when walking home, avoiding certain places in school, and staying close to adults on the playground—in order to avoid their aggressors. These behavioral changes are limiting and don't allow the victim to fully enjoy the world around them. In a sense, the victim is imprisoned by their fear of the aggressor.
4. **Every child who comes to Bitopia must choose a role in order to help the society function. Only Gatherers are permitted to leave the city in order to get food and supplies. What characteristic of Gatherers is similar to what Stewart is doing when the story opens?** Gatherers must be able to run to escape any Venators that they encounter, just like Stewart was always trying to outrun Dirk, Judd, and Frankie.
5. **Are the children trying to change their situation, or have they accepted their fate?** The children are not trying to change their situation or looking for a solution to their problem. They are resigned to hiding in the city until what they believe will be a final battle with the Venators. Only Stewart is trying to change the situation.
 - ⊕ Being passive, hiding, or running usually will not change a bullying situation. Victims of bullying can do a variety of things to get the bullying to stop. These actions include telling an adult, not showing fear or getting upset, talking to the aggressor to find out if there is a reason for the bullying, and/or not showing sensitivity to a characteristic that the aggressor is using as justification for the bullying.
6. **Since aggressors in real life rarely intend serious harm, but the Venators do attack the children, are the Venators a true-to-life representation of aggressors?** No, the Venators are

not true-to-life. The physical aggression of the Venators is simply a narrative device that helps drive the story and makes it exciting.

Part 3: Encounter with the Wolf

1. **After Stewart and Cora are exiled for breaking into the Vault and reading the *Comlat*, where do they go?** They follow the river that runs near the city to find the spot indicated by the map in the *Comlat*. They believe there is a weapon of some sort located at that spot.
2. **What do Stewart and Cora actually find at the spot indicated by the map?** They find an enormous wolf, one of the animal denizens of the land of Bitopia.
3. **Are Stewart and Cora frightened of the wolf?** Only Stewart is frightened. Cora is not afraid.
4. **The wolf can see that Stewart is afraid of him. What does the wolf demonstrate to Stewart and Cora to help them understand fear?** The wolf explains that Stewart's initial fear gave the wolf power over him. Cora doesn't fear the wolf, so he doesn't have that same power over her. He also demonstrates that a fierce growl and bark, actions that can instill fear, have no effect on someone who knows not to be afraid.
 - ⊗ As mentioned, aggressors rarely intend serious harm. Rather, the goal of intimidation is to instill a sense of fear in the victim. It is that fear that gives the aggressor a feeling of power over the victim. Verbal aggression—taunting, name calling, etc.—is similar to intimidation in that it gives the aggressor a feeling of power over the victim if the victim appears afraid or gets upset.
5. **What is the “secret weapon” that the wolf gives to Stewart and Cora?** The “secret weapon” is an understanding of the nature of fear. The wolf wants them to understand that their fear of the Venators comes from within themselves and that their fear gives the Venators power over them. Once the citizens stop fearing the Venators, the Venators will lose their power over the citizens.
 - ⊗ In physical aggression, if a victim can lose his or her fear, he or she takes away the aggressor's feeling of power, which makes the aggression unsatisfying. Verbal aggression will also be unsatisfying to an aggressor if the target doesn't get upset and appears unaffected by the aggression. An aggressor who no longer derives satisfaction from the bullying behavior will usually stop. However, an aggressor who feels upset at the victim or feels offended by the victim may try other ways of bullying. In this case, the victim should talk to the aggressor to find out if the aggressor is angry and, if so, to resolve whatever made the aggressor angry.
6. **Is this secret weapon—the understanding of the role of fear—easy to use?** No, it is difficult to stop fearing something, even if you know that losing fear will take away the power the feared object has.
 - ⊗ It can be very difficult to stop fearing an aggressor, and at first the aggressor may not even believe that the victim is no longer afraid. However, even pretending to be unafraid will deprive an aggressor of the feeling of power and in time the bullying should stop.
7. **Given what the wolf understands about bullying, specifically physical dominance aggression, do you think anyone could bully the wolf?** There are many possible answers as this is a speculative question; however, in general, individuals who understand that fear of the aggressor gives the aggressor power are very difficult, if not impossible, to bully.

Part 4: The Return to the City

1. **What happens when Stewart and Cora return?** Stewart makes it back into the city but Cora is pulled out of the port by Venators. Stewart finds that the citizens are sealing themselves into the city by building a wall across the main gate and sealing the ports.
2. **Who shows the greatest fear?** Lester is the most frightened.
3. **What does Stewart figure out about the Venators?** They are the embodiment of the fear that each citizen has for his or her tormenters from back home. In other words, the Venators represent each citizen's aggressor(s).
4. **How does Stewart convince the citizens to open the gate?** He explains what the wolf told him, that they need to show the Venators that they are not afraid. Even by appearing to be unafraid, the citizens will take away the power that the Venators have over the citizens. Stewart further explains that by sealing themselves into the city, they are in a sense imprisoning themselves and forever losing the opportunity to enjoy and explore the land of Bitopia. They already lost one world—home—by not facing their fears of their tormentors. Now they will be losing another world. He tells the citizens that it is time to stop running and stop being afraid.
5. **Who picks up the first stone, and what does this demonstrate?** Lester, who was most frightened, picks up the first stone. This demonstrates that he is facing his fear and is willing to face the Venators. It is a very brave act.

Part 5: The Confrontation with the Venators

1. **When the Venators come charging through the gate, are the citizens afraid?** Yes.
2. **In the confrontation, Stewart observes another boy and a Defender. How do the boy and Defender act?** The boy is not afraid and asks the Venators why they are bullying the citizens. The Defender is blocking the physical aggression of the Venator but is not fighting back.
 - ⊕ Bystanders (like the boy) can be very effective in stopping a bullying episode and can make bullying an unacceptable behavior within a group of students or a class. A bystander who does not want to intervene in a bullying episode can talk to the victim after it happens to provide support and can even talk to the aggressor to let him or her know that the bullying isn't cool or acceptable.
 - ⊕ Fighting back is NOT a good way to stop physical aggression. A student should defend him or herself until he or she can get away from the aggressor and tell an adult.
3. **What does Stewart realize in his confrontation?** The first step in overcoming the aggression is not to be afraid or not to feel afraid. But he also must take action and show that he is not afraid. He does this by standing up for himself to demonstrate that he feels no fear.
 - ⊕ Showing no fear and appearing unaffected by aggression can be enough to prevent and stop bullying. But sometimes a target has to talk to the aggressor to ask if the aggressor is angry about something and/or to ask the aggressor to stop.
4. **A boy slips into a batch of wet mortar, which the other citizens find funny. The ensuing laughter starts to spread and helps the citizens to overcome their fear. What happens when all the citizens start losing their fear?** The Venators become still and start to fade. They lose their physical form and then disappear entirely. The citizens' fear was the power that enabled the Venators to exist. When the citizens lost their fear, the Venators disappeared.

- ⊗ Showing no fear of and not being intimidated by an aggressor can take away the feeling of power that the aggressor gets from bullying. When this happens, the bullying is no longer fun or satisfying to the aggressor and the bullying will stop.
5. **What does facing their fear of the Venators give the citizens?** It gives them freedom from fear and freedom from the confines of the city.

Part 6: Stewart Returns Home

1. **What happens when Stewart emerges from the drain?** He finds himself face-to-face with Dirk, Judd, and Frankie.
2. **Has any time passed since he first went down the drain?** No time appears to have passed in his world when he was in Bitopia.
3. **What happens in the encounter with Dirk, Judd, and Frankie?** At first, Stewart is afraid. But then he realizes that his fear of them is the same as his fear of the Venators.
 - ⊗ An aggressor should not be thought of as an enemy. Thinking of an aggressor in that way can make the person scarier and can make it hard to see the other aspects of the person not related to their aggressive behavior.
4. **A woman comes out of a shop and sees the confrontations. What does Stewart do differently at the end of the book than he would have done at the beginning?** At the beginning of the story, Stewart would have asked for help from the woman. But at the end, Stewart realizes that he doesn't need the woman's help; he has realized that his fear allows the older boys to torment him and by losing his fear, he takes away the power the boys feel. In other words, Stewart realizes that he doesn't need adult help. And by not getting help, he proves to Dirk, Judd, and Frankie that he is no longer afraid of them.
 - ⊗ Adults can be extremely effective in helping to stop a bullying episode. They can provide advice or take direct action. However, victims who feel the need to get the bullying to stop on their own can use techniques to render the bullying ineffective and deprive the aggressor of the feeling of power and enjoyment from the bullying, which will get it to stop.
5. **Why do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie turn and pedal away?** Because Stewart no longer fears them, they no longer get the same joy and satisfaction in bullying Stewart.
6. **How do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie think of themselves? Do you think that they see themselves as "bullies"?** The text does not say explicitly, but they most likely do not see themselves as bullies. In their minds, they are just having fun.
7. **Is punishment or adult intervention needed to stop the bullies?** No, Stewart is able to do it on his own.
 - ⊗ Punishing bullying behavior can frequently be counterproductive. Being punished can actually enhance the reputation of the aggressor, leading to further bullying. An aggressor who is bullying in retaliation for a perceived or actual offense will feel that punishment is a second injustice, which may result in more intense bullying. However, if a victim feels that he or she cannot get the bullying to stop, the victim should tell an adult and ask for help.
8. **What happens when Stewart goes to school the next day?** Stewart usually sits by the playground monitor at recess. But now that Stewart understands the role that fear plays in bullying, he is no longer afraid of Dirk, Judd, Frankie, or anyone else and is now free to explore the playground and make friends.

- ⊕ Fear of an aggressor can be a form of imprisonment. Losing that fear will set the victim free.

A Note on the Ending

Some students may be confused by the ending, specifically the receipt of the letter from Cora. The story uses a narrative device—the stopping of time—that affects all children who go to Bitopia. Since Cora had arrived in Bitopia in 1924, when she returns home to New York, it is still 1924 even though Stewart goes home at the same time. Each child returns home to the exact same moment that he or she left. Stewart returns to present day. Cora wanted to talk to Stewart again, but she grew up, grew old, and passed away before he was born. When Cora realized that she would die before she got a chance to talk to Stewart, she wrote a letter to him and gave it to her lawyers to deliver to him. She asked to have the letter arrive on the day he returned from Bitopia, as that was the earliest day the letter could be delivered and he would know who it was from. If he received the letter before he went to Bitopia, it would not make any sense. Law firms are able to carry out instructions for people after they die.

Conclusion

Fear limits behavior and gives that which is feared power. In physical (including intimidation) and verbal bullying, the aggressor often gets a feeling of power and enjoyment from bullying others. But by not fearing an aggressor or getting visibly upset, a target of bullying can deprive the aggressor of the joy and feeling of power that comes from bullying, and the aggressor will stop. Students have a variety of effective options for preventing and stopping bullying. These options include empowerment techniques, such as showing no fear, talking to the aggressor, learning to laugh at oneself, and not reacting when a personal characteristic is made fun of or mocked, and telling an adult to get direct help with stopping the aggressor, to get advice on how to handle the situation, or simply to notify an adult so he or she knows about what is happening. Bystanders can intervene directly in a bullying episode to try to stop it or indirectly by talking to the victim and/or the aggressor after the episode ends. All students have a responsibility to notify an adult if they believe that a student may be contemplating an action that would hurt him or herself and/or others.

For a comprehensive list of techniques that students can use to prevent and stop both dominance and relational aggression, please consult the guide *Understanding Bullying and Ways to Make It STOP!*

Bitopia Questions and Bullying Facts

Part 1: The Story Opening—Running from Dirk, Judd, and Frankie

1. How does the story open?

- ⊛ Bullying is repeated behavior that negatively affects another person, such as making the person feel scared, upset, badly about him or herself, or isolated from losing friends. Bullying behavior includes physical aggression such as intimidation, scaring, threatening, shoving, and punching; verbal aggression such as name calling, insulting, and saying other mean things; and harming friendships and relationships with others by gossiping, starting rumors, forming a group to exclude a person, whispering while pointing, betrayal, and secret petitions.

2. Why do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie pick on Stewart?

- ⊛ Aggressors frequently use a characteristic of a person as justification for bullying. The aggressor will often refer to a physical aspect of the person—body shape, size, or feature—or other aspects such as race, nationality, religion, or being the new kid at school, in the course of the bullying. Victims of bullying tend to start thinking of this characteristic as a flaw. It is important to remember that these characteristics are just characteristics, not flaws, and are an excuse by the aggressor to use bullying behavior.

3. Are being smaller than average and new to school reasons to bully another person?

4. How do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie make Stewart feel?

5. Do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie intend serious harm to Stewart?

- ⊛ People who bully using physical aggression rarely intend serious harm. Instead, they use physical actions or intimidation to instill fear.

6. Are the aggressors (a preferable term to “bullies”) actually chasing after Stewart?

- ⊛ When bullying occurs for no particular reason, it is called “opportunistic.” An aggressor will direct his or her behavior at anyone who can be negatively affected by it. The other kind of bullying is called “retaliatory.” This form of bullying is motivated by a feeling on the part of the aggressor of having been insulted or harmed in some way by the target and a desire to get revenge or justice by bullying the victim.

- ⊛ The term “bully” is a label and is dehumanizing. It describes the aggressive behavior of a person but not other aspects of that person. A better term to use is “aggressor,” as it objectively describes the behavior of the person.

7. Do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie enjoy tormenting Stewart?

- ⊛ People bully for many reasons, but most especially: 1. to get a feeling of power over another person; 2. to get back at a person for an actual or perceived offense; 3. to feel better about themselves and help boost their own self-esteem; 4. to get what they want; 5. for enjoyment—for fun and to make others laugh, which provides a feeling of superiority; 6. to maintain or enhance their position in a social hierarchy.

8. What does the bullying of Stewart prevent him from doing?

Part 2: In Bitopia

1. **Can you describe Bitopia?**
2. **Why do the children of Bitopia hide within the walled city?**
 - ⊗ A target is someone at whom bullying behavior is directed. A victim is a target of bullying behavior who is affected by the bullying. All the children in Bitopia at the start of the story are bullying victims. In the type of aggression (dominance) described in the story, it is not the aggressor who determines whether the bullying behavior is effective but rather the target of that behavior. If the target of the bullying behavior is negatively affected by the behavior, the bullying is effective. If the target is not negatively affected, the bullying behavior is not affected.
3. **Are the children able to enjoy this beautiful land around them?**
 - ⊗ Bullying victims will often change their behavior—such as avoiding certain routes when walking home, avoiding certain places in school, and staying close to adults on the playground—in order to avoid their aggressors. These behavioral changes are limiting and don't allow the victim to fully enjoy the world around them. In a sense, the victim is imprisoned by their fear of the aggressor.
4. **Every child who comes to Bitopia must choose a role in order to help the society function. Only Gatherers are permitted to leave the city in order to get food and supplies. What characteristic of Gatherers is similar to what Stewart is doing when the story opens?**
5. **Are the children trying to change their situation, or have they accepted their fate?**
 - ⊗ Being passive, hiding, or running usually will not change a bullying situation. Victims of bullying can do a variety of things to get the bullying to stop. These actions include telling an adult, not showing fear or getting upset, talking to the aggressor to find out if there is a reason for the bullying, and/or not showing sensitivity to a characteristic that the aggressor is using as justification for the bullying.
6. **Since aggressors in real life rarely intend serious harm, but the Venators do attack the children, are the Venators a true-to-life representation of aggressors?**

Part 3: Encounter with the Wolf

1. **After Stewart and Cora are exiled for breaking into the Vault and reading the *Comlat*, where do they go?**
2. **What do Stewart and Cora actually find at the spot indicated by the map?**
3. **Are Stewart and Cora frightened of the wolf?**
4. **The wolf can see that Stewart is afraid of him. What does the wolf demonstrate to Stewart and Cora to help them understand fear?**
 - ⊗ As mentioned, aggressors rarely intend serious harm. Rather, the goal of intimidation is to instill a sense of fear in the victim. It is that fear that gives the aggressor a feeling of power over the victim. Verbal aggression—taunting, name calling, etc.—is similar to intimidation in that it gives the aggressor a feeling of power over the victim if the victim appears afraid or gets upset.

5. **What is the “secret weapon” that the wolf gives to Stewart and Cora?**

⊕ In physical aggression, if a victim can lose his or her fear, he or she takes away the aggressor’s feeling of power, which makes the aggression unsatisfying. Verbal aggression will also be unsatisfying to an aggressor if the target doesn’t get upset and appears unaffected by the aggression. An aggressor who no longer derives satisfaction from the bullying behavior will usually stop. However, an aggressor who feels upset at the victim or feels offended by the victim may try other ways of bullying. In this case, the victim should talk to the aggressor to find out if the aggressor is angry and, if so, to resolve whatever made the aggressor angry.

6. **Is this secret weapon—the understanding of the role of fear—easy to use?**

⊕ It can be very difficult to stop fearing an aggressor, and at first the aggressor may not even believe that the victim is no longer afraid. However, even pretending to be unafraid will deprive an aggressor of the feeling of power and in time the bullying should stop.

7. **Given what the wolf understands about bullying, specifically physical dominance aggression, do you think anyone could bully the wolf?**

Part 4: The Return to the City

1. **What happens when Stewart and Cora return?**

2. **Who shows the greatest fear?**

3. **What does Stewart figure out about the Venators?**

4. **How does Stewart convince the citizens to open the gate?**

5. **Who picks up the first stone, and what does this demonstrate?**

Part 5: The Confrontation with the Venators

1. **When the Venators come charging through the gate, are the citizens afraid? Yes.**

2. **In the confrontation, Stewart observes another boy and a Defender. How do the boy and Defender act?**

⊕ Bystanders (like the boy) can be very effective in stopping a bullying episode and can make bullying an unacceptable behavior within a group of students or a class. A bystander who does not want to intervene in a bullying episode can talk to the victim after it happens to provide support and can even talk to the aggressor to let him or her know that the bullying isn’t cool or acceptable.

⊕ Fighting back is NOT a good way to stop physical aggression. A student should defend him or herself until he or she can get away from the aggressor and tell an adult.

3. **What does Stewart realize in his confrontation?**

⊕ Showing no fear and appearing unaffected by aggression can be enough to prevent and stop bullying. But sometimes a target has to talk to the aggressor to ask if the aggressor is angry about something and/or to ask the aggressor to stop.

4. **A boy slips into a batch of wet mortar, which the other citizens find funny. The ensuing laughter starts to spread and helps the citizens to overcome their fear. What happens when all the citizens start losing their fear?**

- ⊛ Showing no fear of and not being intimidated by an aggressor can take away the feeling of power that the aggressor gets from bullying. When this happens, the bullying is no longer fun or satisfying to the aggressor and the bullying will stop.

5. **What does facing their fear of the Venators give the citizens?**

Part 6: Stewart Returns Home

1. **What happens when Stewart emerges from the drain?**

2. **Has any time passed since he first went down the drain?**

3. **What happens in the encounter with Dirk, Judd, and Frankie?**

- ⊛ An aggressor should not be thought of as an enemy. Thinking of an aggressor in that way can make the person scarier and can make it hard to see the other aspects of the person not related to their aggressive behavior.

4. **A woman comes out of a shop and sees the confrontations. What does Stewart do differently at the end of the book than he would have done at the beginning?**

- ⊛ Adults can be extremely effective in helping to stop a bullying episode. They can provide advice or take direct action. However, victims who feel the need to get the bullying to stop on their own can use techniques to render the bullying ineffective and deprive the aggressor of the feeling of power and enjoyment from the bullying, which will get it to stop.

5. **Why do Dirk, Judd, and Frankie turn and pedal away?**

6. **How do you think Dirk, Judd, and Frankie think of themselves? Do you think that they see themselves as “bullies”?**

7. **Is punishment or adult intervention needed to stop the bullies?**

- ⊛ Punishing bullying behavior can frequently be counterproductive. Being punished can actually enhance the reputation of the aggressor, leading to further bullying. An aggressor who is bullying in retaliation for a perceived or actual offense will feel that punishment is a second injustice, which may result in more intense bullying. However, if a victim feels that he or she cannot get the bullying to stop, the victim should tell an adult and ask for help.

8. **What happens when Stewart goes to school the next day?**

- ⊛ Fear of an aggressor can be a form of imprisonment. Losing that fear will set the victim free.

A Note on the Ending

The story uses a narrative device—the stopping of time—that affects all children who go to Bitopia. Since Cora had arrived in Bitopia in 1924, when she returns home to New York, it is still 1924 even though Stewart goes home at the same time. Each child returns home to the exact same moment that he or she left. Stewart returns to present day. Cora wanted to talk to Stewart again, but she grew up, grew old, and passed away before he was born. When Cora realized that she would die before she got a chance to talk to Stewart, she wrote a letter to him and gave it to her lawyers to deliver to him. She asked to have the letter arrive on the day he returned from Bitopia, as that was the earliest day the letter could be delivered and he would know who it was from. If he received the letter before he went to Bitopia, it would not make any sense. Law firms are able to carry out instructions for people after they die.

Conclusion

Fear limits behavior and gives that which is feared power. In physical (including intimidation) and verbal bullying, the aggressor often gets a feeling of power and enjoyment from bullying others. But by not fearing an aggressor or getting visibly upset, a target of bullying can deprive the aggressor of the joy and feeling of power that comes from bullying, and the aggressor will stop. Students have a variety of effective options for preventing and stopping bullying. These options include empowerment techniques, such as showing no fear, talking to the aggressor, learning to laugh at oneself, and not reacting when a personal characteristic is made fun of or mocked, and telling an adult to get direct help with stopping the aggressor, to get advice on how to handle the situation, or simply to notify an adult so he or she knows about what is happening. Bystanders can intervene directly in a bullying episode to try to stop it or indirectly by talking to the victim and/or the aggressor after the episode ends. All students have a responsibility to notify an adult if they believe that a student may be contemplating an action that would hurt him or herself and/or others.