

Abuse and bullying

— Same Lyrics, Different Song

Stop!
She said.
She said it loud,
But still she wasn't heard.
Could she have said it louder,
Or have used a different word?
If she had said it differently,
Or used a different tone,
Would he have said goodbye to her,
Or nicely walked her home?
She wasn't sure,
But what she knew,
Was something had gone wrong,
As if she sang some lyrics,
But he heard a different song.
And now it was too late to change,
To go back and undo,
Now her feelings overwhelmed her
And she knew not what to do.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- What do you think happened?
- What did she expect to happen when she said 'Stop!'?
- What do you think she would expect to happen on another occasion if she said 'Stop'?
- What does the poet mean when she writes 'As if she sang some lyrics | But he heard a different song'?

- How do you think the subject of the poem feels?
- How do you think the person who didn't stop feels?
- Who do you imagine the poem to be about? What kind of people are they? What kind of relationship do the subjects of the poem have?
- Does the poem read differently if you switch the genders involved? Why?
- What do you think she did next?

Extension activities

- Imagine that a friend confided in you that this had happened to them. What would your advice be?
- Write a prose or poetry response to this poem, perhaps exploring what happens next or exploring the feelings involved.
- Explore whose responsibility it is to say stop and to physically stop in this situation. Consider it from both a legal and a moral point of view then explore what society expects, and consider whether this lines up with your discussion.

— Cyberbullied

As they teased her,
Poked,
And pointed,
Jeering from behind the safety
Of their computer screens,
She sat,
Silently crying.

Tears slowly worked their way down her face,
Their journey practiced and familiar.

Did they know how they hurt her?
She wondered.
Would they persist in this torture,
If they could see her tears?

It's easy, she thought, to be cruel,
When your computer shields you
From the pain you inflict.
But so hard to escape,
When you're the one it's aimed at.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- Do you think that it feels different being cyberbullied than being bullied face to face? Why?
- How do you think the bullies would react if they could see the subject's face?
- Why does the subject find it so hard to escape from her bullies?
- What do you think the subject should do next?
- Would retaliating help in the short, medium or long term?
- Is there any way the subject could use the online world to help her?

Extension activities

- Write a poem from the point of view of the bullies
- Discuss what a typical day might look like for the subject – from the moment she wakes up to the moment she goes to sleep.
- Consider ways in which you could help a friend in this situation.
- Imagine you are with a group of friends who are poking fun at another friend online. They think it's a bit of harmless fun – how should you react? What might make that difficult to do?

— *Iron Gaze*

His grip was like iron,
Though not a finger grazed her skin.
His gaze alone shackled her.
Each movement,
Each word,
...each thought,
Just for him.
What did he want to see?
How could she please him?
Or at least avoid his displeasure?
She hadn't known
That love could look this way.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- 'Not a finger grazed her skin' – do you think that this makes the relationship any less or more abusive?
- What do you imagine the subject's friends and family thought about this relationship?
- Why do you suppose she feels 'shackled by his gaze'? How can a look make us feel helpless?
- What do you think she had expected from this relationship?
- What do you think she should do next?

Extension activities

- Write a letter to the subject, sharing your concerns as a friend and exploring what she might do next.
- Write a poem or some prose which precedes this poem and explores how this relationship started and how things changed over time.
- Write a list of your imagined pros and cons of this relationship.

— *The End, Maybe*

He looked at her
With thinly veiled disgust.
She looked at him
With thinly veiled distrust.
What once worked
Was broken
And twisted and bent;
Where love
Was hatred
And time felt misspent.
She looked at him
And wished that she could leave.
He looked at her,
A look that could deceive.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- Do you think her time really was misspent? Why?
- Do you think she would change things if she could?
- How do you suppose the relationship got to this point, how do you imagine it started?
- What do you think the poet means by the last lines ‘He looked at her, | A look that could deceive’?
- Do you think she feels to blame for the turn this relationship has taken? Why?

Extension activities

- Change the feeling of this poem to reflect a positive relationship by replacing words throughout – consider which words you felt you needed to change and why.
- Consider the difference between love and hate and how love had turned to hatred here.
- Continue the poem to explore what you think the subject should do next.

— *Abused*

After the storm,
She was lovely and sweet.
But kindness
And smiles
Should not be a treat.
Kindness and smiles
Are what we deserve,
Each day
From our parents,
That kindness preserves
The life living in us,
The joy in our souls,
But nastiness, bitterness
Slowly unfolds
The hate we did not know
Was hiding so deep,
The hatred that kindness
And love work to keep
From taking us over,
From ruling our lives,
But hatred creeps in
When we feel
We're despised
By the people
We love, and who
Should love us back;
The abuse of that love's
A most vicious attack.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- What do you imagine the poet means by 'the storm'?
- How would the subject feel during a storm and why?
- What do you think the poem's subject expected of those around her?
- Do you think she felt responsible for the way she was treated? Should she feel responsible?
- Who could she look to for support, advice and guidance?

Extension activities

- Consider what a typical day would look like for the poem's subject – what parts of the day would be especially difficult and why?
- Consider the responsibilities of parents and their children. Think about how these are fulfilled, or not, for the people in this poem.
- Explore the feelings of the parent in the poem. How are they behaving and why? How do you think this makes them feel?

— *Frozen Out*

She felt lonely,
And alone,
Even when the room was full.
No one wanted to utter her name
For fear of falling foul
Of The Bully.
The Bully had picked her,
Singled her out
As The Victim.
She was special
She supposed,
But she did not feel special.
She felt the pain of redirected eyes,
Ceased conversations,
Games cut short.
There was no beating,
And no biting,
But this was worse...
She felt alone
When surrounded by those
She once called her friends.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- What do you imagine a typical day felt like for the subject of the poem?
- What does the poet mean by 'lonely and alone' – can we feel lonely when we are not alone?
- Is it relevant that the people freezing the subject out were once her friends?
- In what way is the subject 'special'? Should she be grateful to be special in this way?
- Why do you think this is happening?
- How does the bully feel?

Extension activities

- Consider different types of bullying and whether one type is more or less bad than another – and where their similarities lie.

- Write a feelings map for the subject of the poem. Consider how she feels at different points in the day and what can be done to relieve difficult feelings and promote positive ones.
- Write a letter from the subject to her bullies saying all the things she wishes she could say but feels too afraid to say aloud.
- Write a list of sources of support that the subject could turn to in this situation.

— *Walking Away*

Afraid of what he'd see if he turned back,
He walked on.
His feet took him further and further
From his unspeakable crime.
His words had maimed and broken,
Bruising more heavily than the hardest punch.
On he walked.
A little less able to justify his actions
With each step forwards.
His pace increased
With his remorse.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- What do you think happened?
- Why does 'his pace increase with his remorse'?
- Words are spoken of as if they have caused similar damage to physical abuse in this poem. What are your thoughts on that?
- Is remorse a helpful emotion here?
- What do you think happened just before and just after the point at which the poem takes place?

Extension activities

- Write a list of questions from the abused to their abuser.
- Consider what is more important – asking questions of the abuser or hearing the answers?
- Draw or paint how you think the abused and the abuser feel – you may choose to make your work abstract but you do not have to.
- Write the dialogue of a conversation between the abused and the abuser that provides some insight into what went wrong here.

— *Betrayed*

Did you ever hate someone
So much it hurt?
Wanted them gone from your life so badly,
That they filled your every waking thought?
Told yourself they were worthless,
Their point of view irrelevant
And misinformed,
Yet hung on their every word?
Found yourself seeking their approval
Though you know it cannot be won?
Waited for a sign they care,
That they cannot, will not give?
All this time, knowing their thoughts rarely turn to you.
That they can destroy your life
In an instant,
Without even trying.
That they truly do not care.
But you do.
You care so much
It hurts.

Exploring this poem in a therapeutic setting

Questions

- Who do you imagine is causing this hurt to the subject?
- What different form does this hurt take?
- Is emotional hurt more or less bad than physical hurt?
- How could the subject escape this pain?
- Why did the poet chose the title 'Betrayed'?

Extension activities

- Do you think the subject is safe right now? What steps could they take to keep themselves safe?
- How do you think the subject feels when they wake up in the morning? What things might worry them each day?
- Who could the subject talk to? How might this conversation go? Perhaps imagine this conversation with multiple different people and imagine how each would play out.