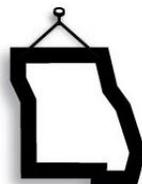
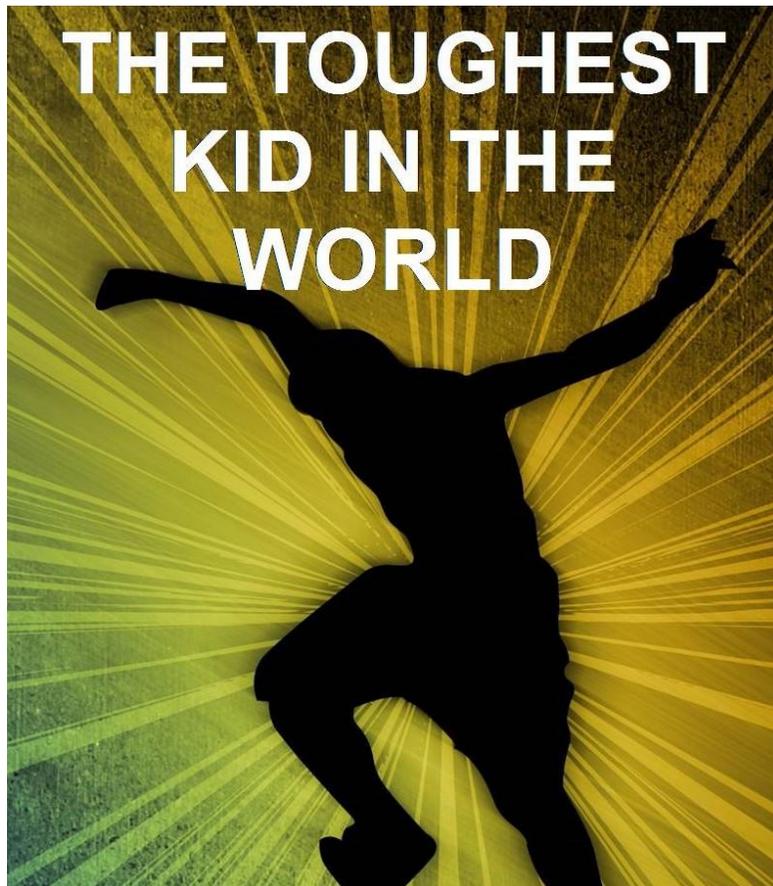


**theatre  
for young  
america**

# STUDY GUIDE

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An educational supplement to the live theatre experience of



**Missouri  
Arts Council**  
*The State of the Arts*



**National  
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for the Arts**  
arts.gov



## WELCOME TO THE 32<sup>nd</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THIS PLAY THE TOUGHEST KID IN THE WORLD.

Since 1986 a version of this original play has been presented by Theatre for Young America every season. Producing Artistic Director (now Executive Director) Gene Mackey researched and developed the script of the play **TOUGHEST KID IN THE WORLD**. It was in response to a request from Kansas City, KS public school officials and Arts Partners of Kansas City. Every year since 1986 Gene and the Artistic Director Valerie Mackey make revisions due to current acts of violence and bullying that have happened throughout the past year. This year the script makes mention of incidents at the Charlottesville, Virginia, Unite–the-Right rally, where there were clashes between gun and torch-carrying white supremacists and unarmed counter-protestors. It also refers to the Las Vegas mass shooting that occurred at the Route 91 HARVEST MUSIC FESTIVAL on October 1, 2017. Also Gene and the Director of Education add any changes to theories of best practices of educators regarding ways to reduce violence in society. The late Molly Jessup added original music to the script. All these artists are concerned about the growing **violence** they see in the world. Gene knows that theatre is a powerful medium for changing attitudes and habits of thought. **Bullying** is a serious issue for people of all ages. **Bullying** causes harm by interfering with learning, and can lead to depression, isolation, or violence. Many news stories have told of teenage suicides by young people who were being bullied. Some of the most harmful bullying is being done by **Cyber Bullying** on the Internet, and cell phone text messaging. Additionally, a large number of people with physical disabilities are targets of bullies so that is addressed the play presentation and the following group discussion.

### THE PLAY AND ITS THEME

Theatre for Young America’s mission with this project is to dramatize events in the life of a boy who longs to be the “toughest kid in the world.” He has decided to be **AGGRESSIVE** in all his conflicts: at home, at school, and in his whole universe. This kid, TK, with the help of the Coach and his sidekick Sparring Partner or ‘Spar’, for short, learns how to resolve conflicts by listening and trying a variety of different strategies. In contrast to TK, Serena, another classmate, is **PASSIVE** in her approach to problems of anger, violence, and peer pressure. She has chosen to hold in all her feeling, to withdraw, and to be submissive to friends and family. With Coach, Spar, and the Stage Manager Ernie, both kids learn ways to get what they need without getting bullied or being violent. They learn that true “toughness” or strength comes from the ability to solve conflicts while avoiding violence. The audience watches bullies, targets, and witnesses in a variety of situations. Using drama as a medium, TYA enables students to identify **bullying** behaviors and to discover what can be done to help targets and bullies and witnesses find better alternate ways to get along in this world.

### IDEAS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

#### WHAT ARE THREE WAYS TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS?

*Passive*

*Aggressive*

*Collaborative*

(DIFFERENT styles work or may be combined depending on each specific situation.)

#### WHAT IS BULLYING?

The National School Safety Center states that **bullying** is any hurtful or aggressive act toward an individual or group that is intentional and repeated. What can you add to that?

## WHAT ARE THE ROLES ONE CAN PLAY IN BULLYING?

**BULLY** (person exhibiting behavior harmful to others)

**TARGET** (could be a victim)

**WITNESS** (a spectator, anyone who has ever observed a bullying interaction)

## What are some of the types of bullying behaviors?

**PHYSICAL**

**VERBAL**

**EMOTIONAL**

**SEXUAL**

**CYBERBULLYING**

## WHAT ARE THE 3 “D”S TO LOOK OUT FOR IN BULLYING BEHAVIOR?

Is it *Dangerous*?

Is it *Destructive*?

Is it *Disturbing*?

## WHAT ARE THE 2 “R”s for WITNESSES? *Responsibility. Respect.*

## WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO SOLVE BULLYING PROBLEMS?

“**SODAS**”: look at the *Situation*, list as many *Options* as you can, list any *Disadvantages*, list any *Advantages*, *Select* the best option to try.

Or, “**POP**”: Recognize there is a *Problem*, look at the *Options*, make a *Plan*.

## SOME CYBER-BULLYING SAFETY SLOGANS:

“*Stop, Block, And Tell!*” “*Think Before You Click.*” “*Google Yourself Often.*”

**REMEMBER: “TAKE A STAND. LEND A HAND. STOP BULLYING NOW!”**

(The slogan of the Health Resources and Services Administration.)

## ACTIVITIES TO FURTHER STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING DISCUSSION, JOURNALING, OR WRITING PROMPTS

### ABOUT BEING A TARGET:

Have you been teased about your clothes or hair? Have you ever been tripped in the halls?

Have you ever felt picked on by an older or larger person?

What are some reasons you feel good about yourself, no matter what people may say?

Have you ever been bullied? What happened? Did you try to stop the person? Did it work?

### ABOUT BEING A BULLYING WITNESS:

Have you ever seen a person being bullied? What did you do? How did that make you feel?

Have you ever tried to stop a bully from picking on somebody else? How did you do it and why?

What will you do the next time you see a kid being bullied?

How would you tell your friends that you thought that they were being hurtful?

### ABOUT BEING A BULLY:

Are your actions or words hurting someone else’s feelings? Are your actions or words hurting someone else physically or making that person afraid?

Are you taking out your anger on someone? Who? Why? Can you stop?  
If your friends wanted to bully a kid, would you join in or watch? Why or why not?

### **ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD A SAFER PLACE:**

Is there an area around your school or neighborhood where there is a lot of bullying?  
Who is an adult you can tell if you are a witness or a target of bullying?  
Who is a person you can tell if you think someone is about to be violent?  
Do you have ideas that might help you be safer in cyberspace?  
Do you play any video games? If so, why, when and how often? What are some positive and some negative aspects of video games?

### **GET SOME IDEAS FROM FOLKS AT HOME**

Ask your parents or other family members if they were ever in bullying situations when they were your age. How did they feel about it? What happened? What anything done?

Pick a TV show and watch it with some members of your family. Ask them what people did in the show that was an example of bullying behavior. For example, was some of the humor “put downs” of other people? Make a list of all the bullying examples you saw.

### **SOME OTHER ACTIVITIES TO TRY**

Can you remember any “put ups” you have heard? What were they? Try to use one today!  
Surprise someone in your life with a “random act of kindness.”  
Research and discuss the word “empathy” (**em-** puh-thee), a noun meaning the ability to identify with another person’s feelings or experiences. How could building empathy help us have a safer world?

### **VISUAL ARTS PROJECTS**

Have the class make anti-bullying posters or anti-violence comic strips.  
Illustrate in a drawing the feelings of a “target” or the feelings of a “bully” or the feelings of a “witness.”  
Illustrate a situation you remember from the play.  
Imagine and then draw an illustration of your changed school without any name-calling or bullying.

### **MUSIC PROJECT**

Make up a song (rap, hip-hop, rock and roll, etc.) with an anti-bullying or pro-peace message. Perform it for your class or group. Make a video of it.

### **DRAMA PROJECT**

Write, cast, and rehearse a short play or skit based on some of the role-playing you saw in the play or something that you have witnessed personally. Perform it for your school, church, or youth group. You could act it out first as it happened. Then re-enact with a different ending or outcome using some of the strategies you see in the play.  
Divide class into small groups. Imagine your school with no name-calling or bullying. Enact how that would look at your school.

