



HIGH SCHOOL FOLLOW-UP CURRICULUM

"Let's Talk Respect"

Everybody is that person to someone.

*Treat others as you would want **that person** treated —
not even just yourself.*

Grades 9–12 • One core session + four optional extensions

Presented by Robert Hackenson Jr., MBA, CAOL • Dynamic Influence

dynamicinfluence.com

Before you start

What this is

Your students sat through an assembly called "**Let's Talk Respect.**"

It is not an anti-bullying lecture and it is not a rules talk. Robert says so in the first two minutes: *"it's not like you need to love everyone, be friends with everybody — that's not realistic."* What he asks instead is a culture question:

What kind of school do you want to go to?

Is it one where you wake up and think *"I don't want to go today"* — or one that's nicer?

And then he does something most speakers won't: he names the room's reaction out loud before anyone can say it.

"Even when I'm saying this, I can feel it. I can almost taste it, where you guys are just like — never happens. It'll never happen. Nothing ever changes."

His answer to that is not a pep talk. It's an argument: **you have to own it**, because the moment you accept that nothing changes and repeat it, you guarantee it.

The two ideas the hour is built on

Everything in this guide installs one of these.

EVERYBODY IS THAT PERSON TO SOMEONE.

Treat others as you would want **that person** treated. Not even just yourself.

BE CURIOUS, NOT JUDGMENTAL.

When you think you know everything, that's when you judge others. And when you've already decided, **you stop asking questions** — which is the exact moment empathy stops working.

What this guide is not

It is not the middle school guide with the vocabulary raised. The high school presentation is a genuinely different hour, and three things that anchor the younger versions **are not in it at all**:

- **No breathing exercise.** None. The emotional-regulation content here is *"you have a choice about your attitude"* and *"put it down, calm down."* If you teach a counted breathing protocol, you are teaching the

middle school lesson.

- **No straitjacket escape.**
- **No "pick one person and say go get help."**

And the Rule of Shoe — the centerpiece of every younger version — appears only so Robert can tell your students why it is **not** enough for them. More on that below, because it is the most important structural thing in the hour.

Why the Rule of Shoe isn't the centerpiece here

Robert introduces it honestly: *"for the younger kids, when I talk to them, I always talk about the rule of shoe."* Before you say something, before you do something, before you send something — stop and put yourself in the other person's shoes.

Then he tells them where it breaks.

"Have you ever had the experience where someone's like, 'would you want that said to you?' And you'd be like — I don't care."

That is the honest teenage answer, and he treats it as honest rather than as defiance. Sometimes you genuinely don't care. Maybe you think you're tough. Maybe that person doesn't matter to you. The rule has nothing left to hold onto.

So he rebuilds it. He fans out a stack of cards with strangers' names on them — Sarah, Emma, Ari, Jim, Carly, Will, Amelia, Emmett. *"You don't care at all. Why would you?"* Nobody argues.

Then a volunteer writes on a blank card the name of **one person she would protect** — somebody where, if you heard what people were saying about them, you'd get angry. She signs it. It goes back into the stack with all the strangers.

And it turns up alone, folded, inside a sealed glass case that has been sitting in front of her the whole time. She reads her own handwriting out loud.

"My dad."

Everybody is that person to someone.

That's the move. The rule stops depending on whether you care about the person in front of you, and starts depending on something you already believe — that somebody, somewhere, feels about that person the way you feel about the name on your card.

Teaching note. Do not re-perform the trick; you can't, and a described magic trick falls flat. What you *can* reproduce is the question. The card activity in Session 1 does exactly that, and it works without any props.

The core session

50 minutes. If you only do one thing, do this one.

Open — 5 minutes

Put the two sentences on the board before students walk in:

- *Everybody is that person to someone.*

- *Be curious, not judgmental.*

Ask what they remember from the assembly. Expect the magic first — the head that shrank, the card in the glass case, the tap. Let them have it. Then: **what was the card trick actually for?**

Discuss — 20 minutes

Work these in order. The order matters; each one sets up the next.

1. He said the Rule of Shoe "falls short" for people your age. Why? Is he right?
2. Somebody asks "*would you want that said to you?*" and the honest answer is "*I don't care.*" What does that actually mean — that you're tough, or something else?
3. The volunteer wrote down one person she'd protect. Who would be on your card? **You don't have to say.**
4. Everybody on that stack of stranger cards is on somebody else's card right now. Does that change anything, honestly?
5. He asked what kind of school you want to go to, then said he could feel you thinking *nothing ever changes*. Was he right? Where does that come from?
6. He says you have to **own** that thought, because accepting it and repeating it is what keeps it true. Push back on that if you disagree.
7. Decisions come out of knowledge — formal education, personal experience, outside influence. Nobody has the same three. So what are you actually doing when you judge somebody's decision?
8. "*We can't put ourselves in those shoes unless you're able to ask questions.*" What's a question you could actually ask somebody instead of deciding about them?

The activity — 20 minutes

THE STACK

You need: two index cards per student.

Part one. Hand out the first card. Read out a list of ordinary first names — common ones, nobody in the building. Ask each student to write down how they'd feel if they heard somebody tearing one of those people apart online.

Collect a few answers out loud. Most will be *nothing*, *don't care*, or *depends*. **Don't push back.** That is the correct answer and it is the whole setup.

Part two. Second card. Write the first name — or just an initial — of **one person you would protect**. Fold it. They keep it. You never collect these and you never ask who it is.

Then, with the folded card in their hand, ask these and let them answer in their heads:

- If the thing that got said about one of those strangers got said about **this** person, how would you feel?
- Would you want to know about it?

- Would you do something?

Then the line that does the work:

Everybody on that first list is on somebody else's folded card right now.

Part three. Open it up. Pick something real and low-stakes — a post, a group chat, a running joke. Ask: *whose card is that person on?*

Close — 5 minutes

One sentence, and it is the one to repeat for the rest of the year:

Treat others as you would want **that person** treated.

The assignment

WHOSE CARD ARE YOU?

1. **Who would write your name on their card?** Name at least two. Not who you wish — who actually would.
2. Pick one of them. **If they saw everything you posted and said this week, what would they think?**
3. Now the other direction. Think of one person in this building you'd describe as *not your kind of person*.
Whose card are they on? What do you actually know about them?
4. One sentence: something you'd want said about **your** person if they were having the worst week of their life.

Teacher notes

- **Never collect the folded cards.** The moment students suspect you might read them, they write something safe and the activity is dead.
- **Part one has to be allowed to land flat.** If you editorialize when a student says "*I don't care*," you've told the room the honest answer is the wrong answer, and part two has nothing to push against.
- **Don't moralize after part three.** It lands on its own. The most common way to lose this lesson is to explain it.
- **A student may name somebody who has died.** It happens. Acknowledge it quietly, let them keep the card, and follow up privately.

Extension I — Your lens, and the labels

30 minutes. Where empathy actually breaks.

What they heard

Robert asks whether anybody has ever looked at something somebody did and thought *"I would never do that. How could you do that? I would never be that person."* Every hand.

Then he tells them that's exactly where empathy stops working, and explains why with a structure worth putting on the board:

Every decision comes out of knowledge. Knowledge comes from three places:

- **Formal education** — school, what you've been taught, what you've read
- **Personal experience** — what has actually happened to you
- **Outside influence** — family, friends, what you scroll past, *"crazy aunt"*

Nobody else on earth has the same three. So when you judge somebody's decision, you are judging it with a set of information they don't have, about a situation you were never in.

Does that make you wrong? Not necessarily. Them? Not necessarily. But:

You can only get into somebody's shoes by asking questions. There is no other door.

And then the part that gets skipped in every other version of this talk — **we do it to ourselves:**

"Sometimes we judge ourselves, and we think about who we are, the situation that we're in, whatever we're born into, and based on that we label ourselves — or other people label us and we accept that, and then we react accordingly. Once you think you're something, then I'm gonna act to live up to that."

Discussion questions

1. Name your three sources. Which has shaped you most? Be honest — for most people it isn't school.
2. Does anyone in this room have the same three as you? So what does that say about our opinions?
3. If you've never been in somebody's situation, can you really say what you'd do?
4. What's the difference between **judging** somebody and **having an opinion** about what they did?
5. What labels get put on people in this building? Which ones stick?
6. Has anyone ever lived up to a label they didn't pick? What would it take to drop it?
7. *"Once you think you're something, then I'm gonna act to live up to that."* Where have you seen that?

The activity

THE DISCONNECT

15 minutes. No materials. Everyone seated. Both of these are from the assembly, and they both fail for everybody — including you.

First, the arm. Right hand up over your head, circling **clockwise** like a clock on the ceiling. Look up at it; everyone agrees it's clockwise. Keep it going, don't change anything, **bend your elbow and bring your hand down below your chin.** Look down. It's going **counterclockwise**.

Same hand, same motion, opposite answer. The only thing that changed is where you're looking from.

Then the foot. Right foot circling clockwise. Keep it going. Right hand out in front, and **draw the number 6** in the air. The foot reverses.

"My favorite is watching some of your faces, like — I could do. But you can't. You know what you want to do, you know what you should do, but you have that disconnect."

Let them fight it for a full minute. Then give them the secret: **nobody ever said how to draw the 6.** Everyone draws it top-down. Draw it from the **inside out** and the foot keeps turning.

Debrief with three questions:

1. With the arm — which answer was right, clockwise or counterclockwise?
2. So if two people watched and gave opposite answers, which one was lying?
3. With the 6 — what was actually stopping you?

You assumed there was one way to do it, and the assumption was the obstacle. **Think about it differently and you get a different result.**

The assignment

REWRITE ONE JUDGMENT, AND ONE LABEL

1. Something somebody did that made you think *"I would never."* No names.
2. **Three** different things that could be true about them that would make it make sense. Three, not one.
3. Turn it into a real question you could ask them. Not a trap question — one you'd actually want the answer to.
4. A label you've accepted about yourself. Where did it come from? Is it true? **And what have you done because of it that you wouldn't have done otherwise?**

Teacher notes

- **Do both tricks yourself and fail at them in front of the class**, then do the 6 the second way and succeed. Confident → stuck → shown a different approach → works. That sequence *is* the lesson.
- **Failure mode:** students break the arm motion when they bend the elbow and then declare it fake. Slow it down; have them watch a partner instead.
- **Part 4 of the assignment is the one that matters** and the one they'll skip if you let them. It is also the one most likely to surface something you need to know. Read them the same day.
- **"Be curious, not judgmental" is the sentence for the wall.** Robert attributes it to Walt Whitman on stage. That attribution doesn't hold up, so use the line and skip the name.
- If a student objects that *"some things are just wrong, you don't need to ask"* — they're right, and say so. The claim is narrower than it sounds: **ask before you decide**, not never decide.

Extension 2 — Your choice

35 minutes. The part students resist hardest.

What they heard

The bad-mood sequence, which they finish themselves. You wake up in a bad mood, and your brain — good at its job — **goes looking to validate it**. It hunts for the negative, because that's what you told it to expect. Then everything feels pointless and hopeless, it builds, and eventually somebody says something and you snap at them, because you needed the release.

It runs the other way too. Somebody says "*you look great today*" and the first move is **"they don't mean it."** *Are they being sarcastic? Are they slighting me?*

You can train your brain to look for the good. The default is negative. That's the thing to battle.

Then the part he spends real time on, from his own kids not wanting to go to martial arts:

"In life there's gonna be times that you have to do things that you don't wanna do. So you have two options. You can go there with a good attitude or you can go there with a bad attitude. Your choice."

Every day you choose the person you want to be, the attitude you carry, and how you react. And the sharp end of it:

"When we don't think about it, we don't own it as a choice — it's just, that's how we are, that's just what it is, and I'm gonna accept it, and then the reaction is that."

Discussion questions

1. Has anyone woken up already in a bad mood, before anything had happened?
2. What does it mean that your brain "looks to validate" it? A real example from this week.
3. Who have you snapped at who didn't deserve it? **Teachers: answer this one first, about yourself.**
4. When somebody compliments you, what's your brain's first response? Honestly.
5. Why do you think the default is negative?
6. **Is your attitude actually a choice?** Push back if you disagree — the argument is the lesson.
7. What's the difference between "*that's just how I am*" and "*that's what I chose today*"? Who's responsible in each?
8. Is there anything you *have* to do this week that you don't want to? What would a good attitude actually change?

The activity

ARGUE THE OTHER SIDE

20 minutes. No materials. Split the room in two. Assign the sides — don't let them pick.

- **Side A:** Your attitude is a choice. You decide how your day goes.
- **Side B:** Your attitude isn't a choice. Things happen to you and you feel how you feel.

Five minutes to build the best case they can. Three minutes each, out loud.

Then switch sides and run it again. Same students, opposite position. This is the half that does the work — and it's a live rehearsal for Extension 3.

Debrief in this order:

- Which side was easier to argue? Which was easier the **second** time?
- Did anyone's actual view move? While arguing, or while listening?
- **Side B has a real point. What is it?**

Let them land the last one themselves: *you don't choose the feeling. You choose what you do with it.* That distinction is the honest version of this lesson and it is far stronger coming from a student.

The assignment

SEVEN DAYS, THREE THINGS

Every day for seven days, write down **three things that went right**. Phone notes, paper, whatever they'll actually use. Must be from that day. Small counts — the point is making the brain hunt in the other direction.

Then one paragraph:

- Did it get easier or harder to find three? What happened around day four?
- **Did you notice anything during the day because you knew you'd be writing it down later?**

That last question is the real one. The effect isn't the list — it's what the hunting does to the day.

Teacher notes

- **Tell your own snapping story first**, with a real person in it. Classes match the honesty of the adult in the room and never exceed it.
- **Let Side B win sometimes.** If this reduces to "just choose to be happy," you've lost the students dealing with something real — and they are the ones who most need the rest of the course.
- **Watch for the student for whom this isn't a debate.** A teenager whose low mood isn't situational needs support, not a reframe. Follow your referral process, and don't let this lesson imply that feeling bad is a failure of willpower.

- The seven-day assignment has a low completion rate if you never mention it again. Ask on day three.

Extension 3 — Win, or learn

40 minutes. The lesson Robert ran on your students without telling them.

What they heard

Everyone says we need more debate. He says the opposite — **we need more conversation** — and the difference is the goal.

The goal of a conversation is to listen and learn. The goal of a debate is to win.

Asked whether they'd rather win or learn, students say **both**. You can't. To learn you have to be willing to lose, and nobody wants to lose. Then: *think of something you've competed in. Did you learn more when you won, or when you lost?* The room says lost. **You learn by failing**. Winning only confirms what you already thought.

He also asks how it feels to be wrong. *Terrible. Horrible. I hate it.* And then the reframe:

You weren't *just* wrong. You were wrong the whole time. **This is just the moment you found out.**

THE SANDWICH

A student explains how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. *"That's not right."* The student explains again. **"You're both wrong."** The room gets annoyed — about a sandwich.

His version: peanut butter on **both** slices, jelly in the middle, so the jelly can't seep through and go soggy by lunch. Then he admits the *"you're both wrong"* was deliberate, to aggravate them. **Not wrong — different.**

And then the layer that makes this the best demonstration in the hour. He delivers the **same information twice**:

- *"You're wrong."* → the room pushes straight back. *That's way too much peanut butter to jelly.*
- *"That's the traditional way. You know another really cool, unique way I heard, to stop it going soggy...?"* → the room leans in.

Same content. *"Is that more or less confrontational? Are you more open to that?"*

Choose your words so people can actually learn from you.

THREE, FOUR, AND THE ROPE

Two people on opposite sides of the same thing. One counts four. One counts three. *How do I get the one who sees four to see three?* A student answers it: **go over to the other side.**

And the rope: throw someone one end and pull. **They pull back.** Push, and they push back. Every time.

THE PART HE RAN ON THEM

In the first two minutes of the assembly Robert was pointedly short with the room about phones and earbuds. Thirty minutes later, he tells them it was deliberate:

"When I was being confrontational before, it was to get to this point later."

"Did you guys get more involved or did you withdraw more?"

Withdrew. *"Screw this guy. You're gonna try to tell me what to do? I'm zoned out. I'm gonna show you how much I don't care."*

He pushed; they pushed back. The alternative is going to their side and asking: *"Hey, what's going on? Are you having a bad day? You just don't wanna be here right now?"* — and then, in his words, **shut up and actually listen.**

Discussion questions

1. Would you rather win or learn? Most people say both — why can't you have both?
2. Something you've competed in: which taught you more?
3. How does it feel to find out you were wrong? Why does it feel like that, when you were wrong the whole time and only just found out?
4. Why did a **sandwich** make people argue? What was the argument actually about?
5. Same information, two deliveries. Why does one get pushed back on?
6. **Did you notice he was being confrontational at the start?** What did you do? Be honest.
7. When somebody comes at you certain they're right, what happens in you?
8. Who's pulling on a rope with you right now? What would going to their side look like — specifically?

The activity

PULL, AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS

20 minutes. You need a rope, a jump rope or a rolled towel. Nobody writes anything.

Part one — the rope, literally. Two volunteers. Hand one end to the second student, say nothing about what to do, and **pull**. They pull back — every time, without being told, within about a second. Run it with three different pairs so the room sees it isn't one person. Nobody ever lets the rope go slack.

Then ask the only question that matters: **"Did anybody tell you to pull back?"**

Part two — the same thing, in words. Take a position on something this class actually cares about and deliver it flat and certain: *"you're all wrong about this, and here's why."* Let them react for sixty seconds. Let it get loud.

Then stop and deliver the **identical** position the other way: *"so the usual take is X, which I get — but here's something I heard that I can't stop thinking about..."* Same claim, same evidence, nothing softened about the substance.

Then have them describe out loud what their own body did each time. Arms. Posture. Whether they were building a counter-argument while you were still talking.

Part three — the callback. Tell them you did that on purpose. Then tell them Robert did it to them with the phones and earbuds in the first two minutes, and ask question 6.

You cannot pull somebody over to your side. The rope only goes slack when you **walk over to theirs**.

The assignment

YOU SEE FOUR? HOW?

Before the next session, have **one real conversation** with somebody who sees something differently — going in to learn, not to win. A friend, a parent, a sibling, a teacher.

- What was the disagreement?
- **What question did you ask?** Word for word.
- What did they say that you didn't know?
- Did your view move? Did theirs? Did it matter?
- What was hardest — and did you manage to shut up and listen?

Plus one line written **before** the conversation: the question you plan to open with.

Teacher notes

- **The earbuds callback is the most powerful thing in this lesson.** Students remember being annoyed in the first two minutes of that assembly; finding out it was engineered is the moment this stops being abstract.
- **Part two only works if you commit to the confrontational version.** A half-hearted one gets a half-hearted reaction and proves nothing.
- **Failure mode:** you pick a topic with a right answer, or one that touches a student personally, and part two becomes an actual fight. Keep it low-stakes but real. Avoid politics, religion, and anything live in this building right now.
- **Keep the substance identical in the second delivery.** If you soften the claim as well as the tone, students conclude the lesson is "be vague and people agree with you," which is the opposite of the point. Same position, different door.
- *"The goal isn't to win, the goal is to learn"* transfers to class discussion, group work, and your own conflicts with them. Use it when **you** are the one being pulled against — students notice when an adult applies their own lesson to themselves.

Extension 4 — You don't see the hurt

35 minutes. The demonstration students talk about afterward.

What they heard

He starts with the thing nobody argues with. **Roasting** — mean-spirited jokes. Hands go up; it's a normal practice, not a hypothetical. So he asks the only question that matters:

Does roasting ever go too far? Yes.
How do you know? — "Dude's crying."
Online — how do you know? You don't.

That's the gap. **What makes it easy online is exactly what makes it dangerous.** You make a comment — do you know what that person is going through? What's happening in their house? No. You have no idea. So it's easy to say, and *"you can say it and actually make more of an impact than you realize."*

The biggest danger is that you don't see the hurt. You don't see the reaction.

THE TAP

Two students face each other. One closes her eyes and is told to take a deep breath and pay attention to everything else going on around her — *take one sense away and the others heighten.*

Robert taps the student whose eyes are **open**. The one with her eyes closed feels it, on the same shoulder.

"Have you ever heard the phrase, sticks and stones may break your bones, words will never hurt you? Did you know that phrase came before the internet? That was back when they just used sticks and stones."
Just because you don't physically touch somebody doesn't mean they're not going to feel it.

GOLDEN RULE 2.0

Post about others as you'd want posted about you — and about the people you care about.

The test: *would I want this up on a billboard for everybody to see?* No? **Then don't send it to somebody else.**

The forms it takes online: hateful insults, spreading rumors, excluding, **outing** — having a secret about somebody and putting it out there — **masquerading**, and roasting.

Discussion questions

1. In person, how do you know a roast has gone too far? Give the actual signs.

2. Online — what are the signs? Is there anything?
3. What's the difference between roasting a friend and roasting somebody you don't know well?
4. Have you ever found out later that something you said landed much harder than you meant? What happened?
5. Why is it easier to say something through a screen?
6. Of the forms listed — insults, rumors, excluding, outing, masquerading, roasting — which does the most damage here? Which would an adult actually notice?
7. The billboard test: would what you posted this week pass it?
8. Golden Rule 2.0 adds "*and those you care about.*" Why does that second half change the test?

The activity

THE SLIPS

15 minutes. You need slips of paper.

Part one. Every student gets a slip. Write **one sentence somebody said about you** — online or in person — that you still remember. No names at all, not theirs, not yours. Fold. Collect and shuffle thoroughly.

Part two. Read a dozen aloud, flatly, with no commentary. Let them sit. Then three questions:

- How long ago do you think most of these were said?
- Does the person who said it remember saying it?
- Did any of these sound like something somebody intended as a big deal?

Almost none of them were. **That finding is much stronger coming out of their own slips than from you.**

The assignment

THE BILLBOARD AUDIT

Private. Students scroll back through their own sent messages, posts, comments and group chats from the last week — their own, nobody else's.

1. Roughly how many would pass the billboard test? A rough count is fine.
2. **Find one that wouldn't.** Write what you'd send instead. Don't post the fix — just write it.
3. Find one where you never saw the reaction. What do you think it actually was?
4. One line you'd take back. Yours. You don't have to explain it to anyone.

Teacher notes

- **Screen the slips as you collect them, and read every one before the end of the day.** State your reporting norms *before* you hand out the paper, not after.

- **Never read a slip aloud that could identify anyone**, even obliquely. In a small class a single sentence can be traced.
- **Roasting is a live practice in most high schools, not a hypothetical.** Treating it as entirely bad loses the room. The honest line is the one from the assembly: the test is whether the person is laughing, and online you can't see whether they are.
- **Don't collect the billboard audit.** It works because it's private. Ask how it went, not what they found.
- If a student says "*people need to stop being so sensitive*" — don't shut it down. Ask them the slip question: *is there a sentence you still remember?* There always is.
- Robert cites research on how much of communication is nonverbal. Those figures get quoted far more confidently than the original study supports, so **make the point without the numbers.** The tap proves it better than a statistic does.

The last ten seconds

This isn't a fifth extension — it is the material from the end of the assembly, and it belongs wherever your schedule has room. It is also the part most likely to change something in a hallway this month.

Keeping your power

Bullying is an imbalance of power. So how does somebody get that power from you? **You give it to them — with the reaction.**

Everyone with a sibling knows the mechanism. *"I'm not touching you." — "Stop it." — "Okay." — "MOM."* That's the win. *"You know the buttons to push."*

If somebody made fun of Robert it would be about being bald, *"'cause people are very original."* Say *"shut up"* and you've handed it over. Instead:

They say	He says
"You're bald."	"You're totally right. I am. You have a nice head of hair, styled all different ways."
"You're so stupid."	"I know, right? So dumb. That's why I'm in school, trying to get smarter."
"You're ugly."	"I know. It's like this awkward stage is lasting forever."
"You're an idiot."	"Nailed it." Or just a thumbs up.

"You don't believe it. Why would I care about somebody that I wouldn't even ask their opinion about? I'm not gonna ask your opinion about me, so why would I care about it?"
"I'm not gonna hold what you think about me over what I think about myself." That's where we get lost.

And if it turns physical

Robert has trained for years and competed — won and lost — and he takes this further than most assemblies will.

First defense: your legs. *"You're totally right. My bad."* Turn and go. **Second: your words.** *"Stop. I don't want to do this."* Physical force is for when you genuinely can't leave and somebody has hold of you.

Then he walks the cost. Verbal argument. They lean in. Double leg, dropped on the head. **Brain bleed.**

Who's liable? Me. Who has serious issues now? Me. And what's my defense — "he said I was bald"? "And I'm gonna give up all of my freedoms and everything else for that?" That's ego.

The bystander

If you see it, you can **tell somebody, step in, not laugh, and support the person being targeted**. And if you say something, it **typically stops within 10 seconds**.

So why don't we? He names the three reasons students actually give:

- *If I say something, they might start targeting me.*
- *It was done to me, so it's okay for it to be done to somebody else.*
- *It's always been done this way, so nothing's ever going to change.*

"And to that I say — bananas."

Everyone opens a banana from the stem. We are the only primates who do; every other one turns it over and pinches the bottom, which is easier, loses the black seed thing, and leaves you a handle. Why do we do it the hard way? *"'Cause whoever taught you this way."* The first person to have a banana showed the next, all the way down to you.

Just because it's the way it's always been done **doesn't mean it's the best way**. The only way to change it is through **action and education**.

How to step in without making it worse

- **Remain calm.** In a shouting match nobody is listening — you're both waiting for your turn to yell. Talking *quieter* brings it down. They may get louder first; it comes back.
- **Allow space.** Don't crowd them.
- **Stand at an angle**, not squared up. **Hands out** — *"less to hit, just in case."*
- **Never turn your back.** Don't point. Don't stare anybody down.
- **Empathize and offer alternatives.** Ask why. *"This person's really upset — what's happening?"* Then: *"I can understand where you're having a hard time with that. This isn't going to go the way you want. What else could solve that problem?"*

The activity

WHAT'S MY DEFENSE?

20 minutes. You need the board. Nobody acts anything out.

Part one — build the chain. Write one line at the top: *somebody says something to you in the hallway*. Then ask the class for the next step, and the next, writing each as a link going down the board. **Do not supply any of them.** They will give you: you answer back · they step closer · somebody films it · you swing or take him down · he lands badly · ambulance · police · suspension · charges · court.

At the bottom write the question and make **them** answer it out loud: **"And what's my defense?"** Somebody will say it. *He said I was bald.*

Part two — the cost column. Second column beside the chain. For each link, what does somebody lose? Again, they fill it: the season · the scholarship · the job application that asks · the record · the other kid's brain · his parents' year. Keep going until the column is longer than the chain.

Part three — wind it backwards. Go up the chain one link at a time: *could it have stopped here? What would that have taken?* They arrive at Robert's order themselves — legs first, then words — and at the fact that the earliest stopping point is usually **somebody else's ten seconds**, not yours.

Part four — the line, and the body. Build a class list of what you'd actually say walking into something. Not speeches — short, low-stakes, deniable. Students produce better ones than any list: *"Hey, what's going on?"* · *"Yo, come on, let's go."* · *"Anyone seen Mr. ____?"* · *"You good?"* · or just walking over and standing there.

Then demonstrate the body position yourself, once, at the front — angled, hands out, space, no pointing — and have them mirror it standing at their desks. Two minutes, no partners, no scene.

Every link on that board had a person standing next to it. **Ten seconds from any one of them and the rest of the board never happens.**

The assignment

THE BANANA REVOLUTION

1. **Open a banana from the bottom.** Pinch and peel. One sentence on how it went. (*Yes, really — it's the lesson in physical form, and it gets done.*)
2. **Teach somebody else.** Anyone. Write down who, and what they said.
3. **Name one thing here that's only still happening because it always has.** Doesn't have to be bullying.
4. **Your line.** The one you'd actually use, in your words, if you walked into something this month. Write it down so it exists before you need it.
5. **Four names.** Four people you'd actually go to if something was happening — to you or to somebody you know. **At least two adults, at least one in this building.** Next to each, where you'd find them.

Teacher notes

- **Read item 5 of every assignment the same day you collect it.** A seventeen-year-old who cannot name one adult in this building is the most actionable thing you will learn all year, and it is fixable without changing anything about the curriculum. Flag those students to your counselor by name.
- **Nobody role-plays a scene and nobody plays an aggressor.** This is built on the board on purpose: a high school room resists performing a conflict, and the resistance costs you the lesson. Describe, chart, mirror — don't stage.

- **Keep the self-defense content accurate.** Robert's order is legs, then voice, then physical only if you can't leave and somebody has hold of you. Don't soften it into "never defend yourself," and don't let it drift into "stand your ground." And add the schoolhouse line he doesn't say: **if it's physical or about to be, get an adult.** Walking over is for the ten seconds before that.
- **Failure mode:** the chain turns into bravado — who'd win, what they'd do. Cut it off by moving to the cost column early. Nobody brags over the cost column.
- **The banana assignment plays as a joke and isn't one.** It's the only task in the course where a student changes somebody else's behavior — which is precisely what the lesson claims is possible.
- **Run this one again in the spring.** Shortest half-life, biggest effect.

For the adults in the building

Six sentences worth keeping

Put these somewhere you'll see them. They do more than any worksheet.

1. **Everybody is that person to someone.**
2. **Be curious, not judgmental.**
3. **The goal of a conversation is to listen and learn. The goal of a debate is to win.**
4. **Put it down. Calm down. Then go talk.**
5. **You don't see the hurt. You don't see the reaction.**
6. **Just because it's the way it's always been done doesn't mean it's the best way.**

Things to expect

The cynicism is real and naming it works better than arguing with it. Robert does this in the first five minutes and it is the single most transferable move in the hour. *"Say more about that"* beats *"that's not true"* every time.

Students will test whether you meant it. The first time a kid repeats one of these lines back at you sarcastically, you're being asked whether this was an assembly or a change. Answer accordingly.

One honest, unprintable answer. When Robert asked what stops us from treating each other well, a student in this recording answered with a crude word, and Robert's reaction was *"that's genuinely true."* He was right — the room was being honest about why they don't bother, which is far more useful than a nice answer. Expect something similar. Take the substance, skip the vocabulary, and don't punish the honesty.

This is the band where the adults matter most. By the time students are seventeen, a program only works if the building behaves as though it believes it. The named-adult item on the last assignment tells you whether it does.

The rest of the materials

- **Student Guide** — the pages students keep.
- **Parent Guide** and **Parent Conversation Cards** — for families.
- **Classroom Conversation Cards** — a deck to pull from when you have ten minutes and no plan.
- **Classroom Poster** — the six sentences, for the wall.
- **Student Survey, pre and post** — Google Forms, matched so you can measure change.
- **The online course** — all of this as eight monthly lessons in the Dynamic Influence portal.

Questions, or want Robert back? dynamicinfluence.com