

Responding to Injustice

Purpose: Develop vocabulary for discussing the range of responses in the face of unfairness, exclusion, discrimination, and injustice.

ADVISOR NOTES:

1. Understanding the Importance of This Activity in a Facing History Advisory

This activity builds on the themes and vocabulary introduced in Activity 47: The Bystander Effect. Advisees will revisit the terms *perpetrator*, *victim/target*, *bystander*, *rescuer*, and *upstander* in upcoming *Community Matters* activities.

APPROXIMATE TIME:

30 minutes

MATERIALS:

HANDOUT

The Range of Human Behavior Vocabulary Terms

2. The Range of Human Behavior: Understanding the Nuances

- Often when students think about acts of injustice, they divide the people involved into two groups: the *victims* (or targets) and the *perpetrators*. But other individuals and groups contribute to the prevention or the perpetuation of injustice. For example, a *bystander* is someone who witnesses or knows about an act of injustice but chooses not to do anything about it. On the other hand, when confronted with information about an unjust act, an *upstander* takes steps to prevent or stop this act from continuing.
- The term *bystander* can be complicated. In most dictionaries, it means a person who is simply “standing by” or who is present without taking part in what is going on—a passive spectator. But some scholars, like psychologist Ervin Staub, believe that even passive spectators play a crucial role in defining the meaning of events by implicitly approving the actions of perpetrators. As seen in Activity 47’s video, “The Bystander Effect,” the choice not to act or speak up is still a choice.

PROCEDURE:

1. Define Terms to Describe the Range of Responses to Injustice

- The video **The Bystander Effect** from Activity 47 provided an opportunity to introduce advisees to some of the terms that describe a range of responses that people might have to an act of exclusion, discrimination, or injustice. For the first part of this activity, advisees will now use context clues to help establish the definitions of four concepts that can be used to describe this range of behavior.¹

¹ Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4–12* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004), 77–78.

- Pass out the handout **The Range of Human Behavior Vocabulary Terms** and instruct advisees to work in pairs to use the context clues in the sentences of the first column to predict the definitions of the underlined words.
- After asking a few pairs to share their predicted meanings of each word and how they came to that conclusion, you can share the dictionary definition and have them record the information in the third column of the chart.
 - **Perpetrator:** A person carrying out a harmful, illegal, or immoral act.
 - **Victim:** A person being targeted by the harmful, illegal, or immoral acts of a perpetrator.
 - **Bystander:** A person who is present but not actively taking part in a situation or event.
 - **Upstander:** A person speaking or acting in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.
- Invite advisees to critique the dictionary definitions. Do they have any questions about these definitions? How are they similar to or different from their own definitions? Are the dictionary definitions adequate, or do they need to be further revised?
- You might point out that these dictionary definitions are written in the present tense (“carrying out” and “being targeted”) and ask advisees to give examples of how a person may act as a perpetrator or bystander at one moment in time and be targeted as a victim at another moment in time. Therefore, these are *roles* that people play and not permanent identities.

2. Apply Vocabulary to Your Own Experience

- Have advisees take out their journals, and tell them that they will not have to share what they write if they don’t feel comfortable doing so. Then ask them to respond to the following two prompts. Don’t reveal the second prompt until they have had time to respond to the first one.
 - Write about a time when you were a perpetrator, victim of an injustice, bystander, or upstander. What happened? What choices did you have? What factors motivated your choices? How did you feel in the moment?
 - Next, write about a time when you chose a different role. If you wrote about being an upstander, now write about another time when you were a perpetrator, victim of injustice, or bystander. What happened? What choices did you have? What factors motivated your choices? How did you feel in the moment?
- After they have had time to write, you might ask if there are any volunteers who want to share the factors that motivated their choices and how they felt in the moment. You can also revisit the T-charts from Activity 47 to see if the group wants to add any new factors.



The Range of Human Behavior

Vocabulary Terms

Directions: Use the context clues in the sentence in the first column to predict the meaning of the each underlined term, and write your definition the center column. Leave the third column blank.¹

Sentence	Predicted Meaning	Actual Meaning
The perpetrator of the crime was caught not long after robbing the convenience store and fleeing on foot down the crowded street.		
The victim of bullying didn't want to go to school and instead crawled back into bed and pretended to be sick.		
Despite feeling a knot in her stomach while reading the hateful comments on her childhood friend's social media feed, the bystander put away her phone and headed to the gym for volleyball practice.		
After three days of reading the increasing number of homophobic comments and threats on his friend's blog, the upstander picked up his phone and texted: "You don't deserve this treatment."		

¹ Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts*, 4–12 (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004), 77–78.