

ASCA. Professional School Counseling 6, no. 1: 46-54.

Pedro Noguera, (2003). The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African-American Males. *Urban Education 38, no. 4: 431-59.*

Dan Olweus, (1993). *Bullying at School.*

Ken Rigby, (1996). *Bullying in Schools: And What To Do About It.*

Steven B. Sheldon & Joyce L. Epstein, (2002). Improving School Behavior and School Discipline with Family and Community Involvement. *Education and Urban Society 35, no 1: 4-26.*

Rachel Simmons, (2002). *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls.*

Bruce L. Wilson & H. Dickson Corbett, (2001). *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want..*



Facilitators' Guide to *The Decision*



Script by Gerardine Clark
Directed by Richard Breyer
Facilitators' Guide by
Joan N. Burstyn and Peter C. Smith
(Copyright 2004)

This project was supported by grant no. 2002DD-BX-0046 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a component of the United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.

We wish to acknowledge
 Judge Martha Walsh Hood,
 Onondaga County Family Court,
 for her vision & enthusiasm in
 support of this project.

The Hamilton Fish Institute

<http://www.HamFish.org> This website has a list of bibliographies, and a data base of programs to prevent violence in schools.

The Journal of School Violence

<http://geneslight.com> The journal's website contains links to other sites such as Bullying Online (UK); Nature and Prevention of Bullying (A European Commission project involving schools and scholars in Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Germany); and the Virginia Youth Violence Project whose website includes a section on bibliographies.

BOOKS & ARTICLES

- A. Beane, (1999). *The Bully Free Classroom: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8*.
- Ellen deLara, (2002). Peer Predictability: An Adolescent strategy for Increasing a Sense of Personal Safety at School. *Journal of School Violence 1, no. 3: 31-54*.
- Lisa Delpit, (1996). *Other People's children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*.
- David R. Dupper & Nancy Meyer-Adams (2002). Low-level Violence: A Neglected Aspect of School Culture. *Urban Education 37, no. 3: 350-64*.
- James Garbarino, (1999). *Lost Boys: Why Our sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*.
- James Garbarino & Ellen deLara, (2002). *And Words Can Hurt Forever: How to Protect Adolescents from Bullying, Harassment, and Emotional Violence*.
- Mary A. Hermann & Abbe Finn, (2002). An Ethical and Legal Perspective on the Role of School Counselors in Preventing Violence in Schools.

ROLE PLAY

- Small groups re-enact scenes from the film in which one or more of the characters responds differently from the way he or she did in the film.
- Discussions about the various outcomes, and the emotions involved, follow each re-enactment.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION AFTER THE EVENT

- The suggestions generated during discussions are printed and distributed as a brochure for the group or the school.
- Suggestions are posted to a listserv of interested adults.

RESOURCES**JOURNALS & WEBSITES*****Educators for Social Responsibility:***

<http://www.esrnational.org> This website contains curriculum materials for elementary, middle, and high schools on ways to prevent bullying and to resolve conflicts peaceably.

Family Court: 3 websites

<http://www.courts.state.ny.us/kiosk/kiosk.htm> This website contains excellent descriptions of all the activities conducted by Family Court in New York State.

<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org> This website contains information about activities of the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in relation to issues dealt with by Family Court.

<http://abanet.org/unifiedfamcrt/home.html> This is the website of the American Bar Association concerning Unified Family Court. It is a good source for information on activities taking place nationally.

PURPOSE OF THE FILM:***THE DECISION***

(12 minutes)

The Decision tells a story of how bullying in a middle school leads to a student appearing in Family Court. The film provides opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to discuss ways to eradicate such behavior.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

To help educators, students, parents, counselors, psychologists, and social workers:

- Understand the forms of intimidation that may lead students to use a weapon
- Learn about the ways Family Court functions and deals with the consequences of students' use of weapons.
- Find topics for groups to discuss about the film
- Locate additional sources for further exploration of the themes in the film
- Provide ideas for eliminating or reducing intimidation among students.



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed to help people prepare to see *The Decision* and to discuss it afterwards. It should be useful to groups of:

- Adults, including parents, teachers, and other school personnel.
- Students. While the film depicts middle school students, it will be useful for older or younger students.
- Adults and students combined. Discussion of inter-generational misunderstandings may be stimulated in this kind of group.

Facilitators will want to use the study guide in preparing to show the film. The guide provides discussion topics and activities that draw on the issues raised in the film. We hope that the suggested activities will stimulate you to develop further activities of your own.



4. *ISSUES RELATING TO FAMILY COURT*

Ask participants to consider the roles of Family Court

- In punishing Spooner for attacking Malchik with a knife
- In punishing Malchik for bullying Spooner
- In explaining the legalities of self-defense and what is an appropriate response to a threat
- In assisting both boys to avoid bullying and violence in the future
- In helping their families, and the families of others, to work with their children to settle disputes amicably and avoid violence.

5. *GENERAL QUESTIONS*

- What opportunities should schools provide for students to make meaningful relationships and acquire respect for one another?
- How are “appropriate” classroom behaviors created?
- Are students able to intervene when they see injustices being done to classmates?
- How is the story of Spooner’s ancestors similar to his own story?
- What could parents, such as Spooner’s mother, do to learn more about their child’s transition to a new school?
- What is an appropriate level of parent involvement in school?

2. ***ISSUES RELATING TO THE STUDENTS:***

Ask participants to consider not only those students with major roles in the film, but also those with minor ones. E.g.

- In scene 2, Pooch joins with Malchik in preparing and throwing the water balloon. In what other scene or scenes does Pooch encourage Malchik to bully Spooner? Do others do the same thing?
- Could Pooch or others have stopped Malchik from bullying Spooner? If so, how?
- How important are Malchik's "encouragers" in leading Spooner to feel he is threatened?

3. ***ISSUES RELATING TO THE ADULTS:***

Encourage participants to consider the actions of those adults with both major and minor roles in the film. E.g.

- In scene 1, the teacher takes several actions that lead to unintended results. How could he have acted to prevent those results?
- In scene 4, Spooner's mother talks with him about his family background. How could she have acted to prevent Spooner's later actions?
- In scene 6, some students try to trip Spooner in the corridor. How could the adults in the school have acted to stop that?
- In scene 7, a bystander shouts to Malchik and his friends to stop harassing Spooner. Could he have taken other action to stop their bullying? If so, how?

IN PREPARATION FOR SCREENING

Decide on the purpose of showing the film *The Decision* to the various groups. For instance, the purpose may be:

- To have students understand the consequences of Spooner's and Malchik's actions as they relate to Family Court, and to have students understand the breadth of activities Family Court handles. In this case, additional preparation may include arranging for a follow-up visit to a Family Court, and the visit to the school of a Family Court officer. If a visit from a Family Court officer coincides with the showing of the film, he or she could assist in facilitating the discussion of it.
- To engage students to think of alternatives to the actions taken by students in the film. In this case, additional time will be needed for students to consider what the alternatives might be.
- To engage adults in discussion of ways to deal with students, such as Jim Spooner, who are unwilling to discuss at home issues relating to violence at school. In this case, additional preparation may include arranging for the participation of one or more professionals, such as a counselor or psychotherapist. Materials on organizations and individuals available for assistance may also be provided.
- To engage adults working in a school in discussion of ways to prevent violence there. In this case, time will need to be assigned for brainstorming and decision-making. Additional source materials may also have to be provided.

Decide whether to show the film in its entirety before having any discussion or have the facilitator stop the film at a particular scene to start a discussion about the options open at that moment in the film to any one of the characters.

- Adult groups may wish to focus their discussion on the options open to the teacher, parent, or bystander, while student groups may wish to focus on those open to Spooner, Malchik, Pooch, or one of the other students.

Decide which activities you want the viewing group to participate in after the screening, and arrange a timetable that includes each one.

Make sure the context for the film has been carefully described to the audience before the film is screened.



ACTIVITIES FOR AFTER THE SCREENING OF *THE DECISION*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Examples are provided under each heading, but facilitators are encouraged to develop additional questions of their own. Several questions under *MOMENTS WHEN A DECISION IS MADE* and *GENERAL QUESTIONS* could, equally well, be asked under one of the other headings.

1. *MOMENTS WHEN A DECISION IS MADE:*

Ask questions about the decisions various characters made in each of the 12 scenes noted above. E.g.

- In scene 1: What decisions of the teacher helped to build or undermine a sense of community in the class? What other decisions could he have made? How could the teacher have provided a smoother transition into the class for Spooner?
- In scene 3: What effect on Malchik and his friends did the girl's decision have when she called out to them to stop attacking Spooner in the lunchroom? What different decisions might she or they have made after she called out?
- In what ways did Spooner's discussion with his mother, in scene 4, influence his decision in scene 8?
- In scene 10: What made Malchik decide to move forward to grab the knife from Spooner? What other action might he have taken?

- 10. IN THE STREET** Jim Spooner is followed by a group of students. He runs to find his knife, then turns on the group saying that if he is attacked he will use it. Members of the group urge Malchik on. Malchik approaches Jim who cuts his arm with the knife.
- 11. SPOONER'S HOME** At dinnertime, Jim is not eating his food. His mother is concerned. There is a knock on the door. It is a police officer looking for Jim.
- 12. THE COURT HOUSE** In Family Court where Jim Spooner, accompanied by his mother, is told that he is charged with a Violation Petition: Assault in the Second Degree.



ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT OF *THE DECISION*

Make clear to each group that:

- The film compresses into 12 minutes several situations that in reality would take place over several weeks or even months.
- Other aspects of the film may seem unrealistic to the audience. After the film is shown, members of the audience could discuss those aspects and their reasons for believing they are unrealistic.
- The film is designed to show how violence has many forms, and how it escalates through a series of decisions causing actions that lead to the use of weapons.
- The setting is a middle school, but similar events might take place in other school settings.



OVERVIEW OF THE FILM

The film consists of several scenes, each of which may be chosen for further examination.

1. **CLASSROOM** The teacher enters to begin a class. He chides the students for being so noisy as he enters. One student, Malchik, enters late. Then, a new boy, Jim Spooner, enters, speaks to the teacher, and takes a seat. Several incidents occur during that class and as it ends. The teacher categorizes the behavior of some students.
2. **TOILET** Malchik and Pooch throw a water balloon (presumably at Spooner.)
3. **LUNCHROOM** Jim Spooner sits with several students who smear his face with frosting from a cup cake. One student calls out, in vain, to the others to stop.
4. **SPOONER'S HOME** His mother is preparing dinner when Jim asks her about his family background. His mother tells him how his family immigrated on her side from Cuba and on his father's side from Holland or Germany. She explains that poor boys in Europe were often conscripted to serve in armies and had no choice but to serve. His ancestors had fled to avoid



conscription. Jim calls them cowards. His mother explains they were not cowards; how brave they were to move to another country whose language they did not know, and how later generations had fought in World War II because they believed in what they were fighting for.

5. **CLASSROOM** The teacher praises Jim Spooner's academic work, and criticizes the work of Malchik, another student.
6. **IN THE CORRIDOR** Someone tries to trip Jim Spooner.
7. **IN THE STREET** On the way home from school, several classmates accost Jim Spooner asking him what his grade was. One looks through his bag and tears up his work, while Malchik chides him for being so modest. A bystander with a dog calls out to the group to stop harassing Spooner.
8. **SPOONER'S KITCHEN** Jim Spooner, fearing he may be attacked on his way to or from school, searches for a knife which he wraps in a towel.
9. **OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL** As he walks to school, Jim Spooner hides the knife outside the school in the bushes.

