

teaching **STAGE**

FALL 2016
VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 1

NEW KID

BY DENNIS FOON

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We all want to fit in. We want friends who know us and accept us for who we are. Sometimes, the most pain we feel comes from believing that no one accepts us, or understands us. We may come to question our worth. Everyone feels that way some of the time. Sometimes things happen in our lives that make those feelings stronger, such as starting a new school, having a friend move away, or a parents divorce. What's important to recognize is that we're not alone: everyone experiences those feelings. Imagine how hard it would be to get past those feelings if you suddenly lived in a place where no one spoke your language. How hard would it be to get past those feelings in order to find friends who can help us feel like we truly belong? What I love about New Kid is the way we step into that world. Nick and his mom speak English, like we do, and we identify with them and get a sense of what it's like for those who don't speak English as their first language. Wonderfully, we recognize that they're just like us. Nick wants to make friends, and to belong, just like we do. Much like we feel we don't belong sometimes, for Nick, English is one of those things that gets in the way. And, like us, he has to overcome other things that can get in the way, like starting at a new school or facing down a bully. I hope we can all be like Mench and reach out to those around us who may not feel like they belong and help them to know that we do care about them and that they are worthy of love and belonging, no matter what their personal struggle may be. – Isaac Walters



IMMIGRATION

An immigrant is anyone who moves to another country with the intention of living there on a long-term basis.

Immigrating to a foreign land can leave a person feeling lonely, depressed, isolated, and lacking confidence. A new home may be the only choice for protection, security, health, safety, or happiness. There are no guarantees. But, an immigrant may become closer to their family, learn a new language, and encounter various cultures. It is experiences like these that can give immigrants strength, knowledge, power, and empathy. May we all be more empathetic to those living in what we may consider normal; but to them is “as strange to them as they are to [us].”

PREJUDICE AND INTOLERANCE

Prejudice is judging someone, or having an idea about someone, before you actually know anything about a person or a group. Usually the opinion is based on the other person's appearance, cultural background, or social group. Prejudice is usually negative, and often not very nice. For example: Athletes can't pass their classes; Gamers are weird and friendless; Blondes are stupid; Asians are good at math. These are all examples of prejudice.

Intolerance means that a person is unwilling to accept the differences, beliefs, and ideas of other people. Being “intolerant” means that you don't respect another person's ideas or beliefs. Just because you may not agree with someone who believes Big Foot is real, doesn't mean that you shouldn't respect the research Big Foot hunters have done. Or because you hate fish doesn't mean people who eat fish are disgusting. Thinking such things are examples of being “intolerant.”

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, TOLERANCE, AND ACCEPTANCE

A culture is a group or community that shares a common experience. It can be a group someone is born into, such as race, national origin, class, or religion. Culture can also be a group a person joins, such as moving to a new country, or state, or a change in economic status, or becoming disabled. We can belong to many cultures at once. It is important to remember humans have much in common – a person who grew up in Nepal will see the world much differently than a person who grew up in San Francisco, but at the end of the day, all humans experience pain, fear, hopes, worries and dreams. Everyone wakes up with the sunrise, ready to face a new day.

Rather than pretend that cultural differences don't exist, and expect everyone to behave the same way with the same traditions and experiences, we should strive to appreciate how different cultures make a strong and diverse community, and how we can learn and grow from such differences.

“Tolerance is respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.” – UNESCO

New Kid introduces us to a young girl named Mench, who meets a new move-in named Nick. He isn't like anyone else, at least, in the eyes of those from America. Instead of treating him differently, Mench quickly discovers that she and Nick have more in common than they have differences. She accepts him as best she can, but society sometimes will tell her that is wrong. She makes judgments based on what she knows to be right in her heart, despite the consequences she may receive from those around her that choose to not accept those who may be a different race or culture. Acceptance is about seeing with the heart, giving chances, and realizing we are all trying to do our best at this thing called life and we all need each other.

BULLYING

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

As the main character of *New Kid*, Nick, states, “Picking on people is an international sport.” Bullying is a social sickness that plagues people from every culture, country, class, and race. It is often a symptom, (as we see in Mog's case) of trying to cope with an idea or a person that we do not fully understand. Things like racism, bigotry, sexism, and others are extensions and evolved manifestations of an act we know as bullying. In *New Kid*, we get to see a very finely painted portrayal of what the world of a boy being bullied looks like.

We must understand that although bullying may present itself as a problematic yet conquerable and innocent enterprise, if it is not circumvented at a young age, then it can evolve into a sickness that is much more malicious and harmful than schoolyard bouts of childish frustration. If we can successfully fill children's hearts with charity and understanding, then perhaps we can end bullying and the side effects that come as a result for our future generations. For the sad truth of our human psyche is that once we have become accustomed to a certain course of action we do not deviate from it. As is made clear with the mother on page 35 of *New Kid*, adults are grim and serious wielders of traits like bullying and bigotry. We must vanquish the seeds of hatred and small minded thinking before they are sown into our future minds.

TRANSLATIONS OF COMMON WORDS IN THE PLAY

Gander dis – Look at this.
Ee bee crookee – I feel sick.
Chunken da hershee – Piece of chocolate
Glitter poop – Candy sprinkles

Gerseglob – Baseball
Ver shure – For sure
Munch mow-er – Lunchtime
Gros bos – Big deal
Nax – No

Yo – Yes
Taka – Thank you
Nax vay, row-zhay – No way, Jose.
Lock-you-bent-or – Calculator
Maypoleepo – Flag

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE THE PLAY

1. What does prejudice mean?
 - What are examples of prejudice?
 - Have you ever seen it?
 - Do you think you have any prejudices?
2. Have you ever been bullied or have you bullied someone else?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Have you seen someone being bullied?
 - Did you do anything?
 - What can you do if you see bullying?
 - Ask the students to watch for examples of bullying in the play.
3. How can you communicate with a person who speaks a language you don't understand?
4. When new kids come to your school, how are they greeted?
 - How should they be greeted?
 - Are you scared of new kids?
 - Do you think they may be scared of you?
 - What are ways you can help them feel welcome?

QUESTIONS TO ASK AFTER THE PLAY

1. How did the costumes, set, and props help you understand the characters and the play?
2. When Nick and Mench become friends, what are ways they avoid confrontation with Mog?
3. Would your school be an easy place for Nick to fit in? Why or why not?
4. Think of a person who is “different” in your school, church, neighborhood, or after school activities.
Do you avoid or make fun of that person?
 - Why do you do that – are you afraid of differences?
 - Do you think Mog was afraid of Nick?
 - How do you think that person would feel if you simply said “hello” to them?
 - How do you think it would make you feel?

ANTI-BULLY PLAN (COURTESY OF CHILDSPLAY AZ)

Being a bully is not cool! Neither is being the target of a bully OR being the witness to bullying. Create an Anti-Bully Plan for your school that includes rules to follow as well as consequences for breaking those rules. Create posters with rules and consequences and post in your classroom or around the school. Allow the students to contribute.

Here's an example to get you started.

- We will not bully other students.
- We will help others who are being bullied by speaking out and getting adult help.
- We will use extra effort to include all students in activities in our school.

SOURCES

www.Childsplayaz.org; www.stopbullying.gov; www.tolerance.org; www.ctb.ku.edu;

CREDITS

Teaching Stage is published by the Noorda Theatre Center for Children and Youth at UVU. This issue was edited by Outreach Coordinator Kynsie Kiggins and includes material provided by the actors in New Kid: David Chamberlain, Kelsey Hatch, and Paris Abigail Moore.

UVU
UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY
NOORDA REGIONAL THEATRE
CENTER for CHILDREN & YOUTH