

“YAGA, TAWAN, TAWIN”: *Young Audiences addresses bullying with five new Beacon Street programs, and workshops too!*

Those three words are boldly screened yellow on one of my son's navy T-shirts. The T was awarded to him after a couple hard fought weeks of swim practice when he was a freshman at Saint Ignatius. The coach said he had earned it. If you read the words quickly, you might get the message: “You got to want to win.” According to the coach, there is no substitute for that attitude.

Practice was as much a part of the season as the first official swim meet. And preparing students for inevitable encounters with bullying behaviors during the school year is also time well spent. Based on anecdotal evidence I have received from numerous teachers, instilling a positive and confident attitude in the student body is the best foundation on which to build a prevention strategy. The kids “GATA WANAS TOPIT.”

“Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio enriches the lives of children and promotes creative learning by uniting arts and education.” That is their mission, and starting this fall, they will be relying on us to help students K thru 8, teachers, staff, and parents appreciate how bullying can be identified and addressed. We plan to get into the nitty-gritty task of encouraging everyone in the school community to do what she or he can to promote the safest learning environment possible.

Nobody knows arts in education better than the Young Audiences staff, and they have been as diligent as they have been creative in helping Beacon Street shape five assemblies and just as many workshops for the soon-to-be-published fall catalog and web site. (www.yaneo.org)

Our “We First” bullying prevention program seeks to engage every student in an effort to build a strong network of support and encouragement on all grade levels, an atmosphere that leaves little or no room for demeaning or intimidating behaviors. Incorporating that philosophy into 45 to 60-minute assemblies called for some creative *ensembling* of movement, song, rounds, puppetry, storytelling, and hands-on effort from volunteers. Here is a snapshot of what we have planned.

It's never too early to invite youngsters to feel like an integral part of the school community to

which they all contribute and belong. The K thru 2 assembly will include a puppet presentation offered by five or six volunteers who will put features on the faces with Velcro. The puppets are atop small broomsticks so the story the puppeteers are hearing and acting out for the first time should be visible above the curtain. Before the assembly concludes, even more volunteers will lead the others through an interactive rendition of John McCutcheon's “Kindergarten Wall.” Lyrics such as “Don't hurt each other” and “Hold hands, stick together” should land in a good place.

Grades 3 and 4 will be introduced to my 18-speed, 1973 Whitcomb bike and subsequently be invited to surrender thirty-six volunteers who will become two sprockets and a chain. (The activity works on paper!) Sixteen kids will have to form two tight circles, interlock arms, and then allow twenty others to form a chain between and around them. When we invite the ten in the front sprocket to start turning slowly, the chain should move as well, prompting the six students who make up the rear sprocket to turn too. That's what makes a bike go. After we congratulate the volunteers, we'll see if they can make the connection to making the school community “turn” just as well.

Students at this assembly will see the Whitcomb suspended in front of them on a bike stand, and none of them will be surprised to see the rear wheel spin when I grasp a pedal and turn the crank. Probably all of them have a bike at home in reasonably good working order. This lesson will suggest that all their effort from the seat is transferred into forward motion because of the chain.

There are about 450 parts in a bicycle chain: plates, rivets, and rollers. There are often a similar number of students in a school community. And just as a chain can be marginalized by poor lubrication or a maladjusted rivet, so a school can be stymied by the threatening behaviors of a few characters in need of attention. Please pass the oil.

Fifth and sixth grade assemblies will be surprised to see a tricycle front and center in the gym. I will start with the following short story.

He pulled up on his cycle, hardly making a sound. He was comfortable in the saddle.

He wore oversized shades, a denim shirt with no sleeves, and one tattoo was visible on his upper arm. He had a suspicious look on his face.

I said to him, "Hey."

He nodded.

"Nice ride," I continued, looking over his cycle, trying to engage him in conversation.

He was still checking me out, so I made a comment about the tattoo.

"Where did you get that? It's new."

"Uh-huh," he finally broke the silence. "I like Scooby Doo. My mom put it on me."

Tommy was three-and-a-half, and his tricycle was red.

This gathering will address the need to build confidence sufficient to address bullying when it shows up. Adults in the building are often multi-tasking and they can't be everywhere at once. Kids, however, see everything. They are they witnesses when bullies strike. Students need to learn what to do in those circumstances, and they need to do a couple of things right away: 1) demand that the bullying stop, 2) send someone to get adult assistance immediately, and 3) remove the victim from harm. But the very force that targets the victim can paralyze witnesses. That's where the trike lesson rolls in.

We all started on a three-wheeler. Why? It's steady. It's safe. It's a great way to start. From there, we eventually graduated to two wheels, or even one! So in this lesson, we are suggesting it is easier for someone to confront bullying behaviors if there are three witnesses present. Three will instill confidence. It's a safe way to start. Of course, we'll get the smallest student present to take a spin around the gym.

I have a very handsome milking stool I will hold up for the students, too. It doesn't matter how uneven the barn floor is, a three-legged milking stool will always be steady. (And you don't ever want to take a tumble on a dairy barn floor.) "Three" will show up a few more times in this assembly: in story, a round, and an activity. Hopefully, "three" will be a magic number for 11 and 12 year-olds who can often be totally consumed by peer pressure.

Grades 7 and 8 will be challenged to solve

problems. In Carl Safina's book, "The View from Lazy Point," the author suggests we are good at puzzles, but not at solving problems. His lyrical book is about the environment, a challenge as systemic as the education of our children. Success with bullying prevention among junior high students relies ultimately on their willingness to feel responsible for each other. That's the problem with the world today, Mother Teresa used to say, "we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

We will reach for a lesson from the bicycle again. A brief demonstration of the force of a spinning wheel should be entertaining, and these young men and women might be interested to know that the key components in the spinning wheel are a dozen or more tiny steel ball bearings. These meticulously manufactured items *bear* the entire weight of the bike and rider. If even one is not "happy," is out of round or missing, the rider will know. He will feel it in the seat of his pants.

A favorite story and some creative play with discarded hosiery will invite students to admit to and embrace the benefits that can come to an entire school community if we think and act with others in mind. They will become the community they create. They can solve this problem if they want to.

Finally, we will dare to bring out the puppets with this crowd. A rowdy and somewhat athletic presentation will suggest the importance of good order in a crowded school, and that "reporting" incidents can help insure a better day tomorrow. Peer pressure can work both ways, and the majority of the student body wants a trouble-free school day.

A workshop setting will work better with the adults. Teachers will be able to ask questions and parents may want to know why things appear to be so different in the building these days. It's a workshop, so I plan to learn as much as they do. Individual classrooms can also invite us to offer a workshop format to hone intervention skills and explore the most successful ways to make schools safer.

Any school can book the new programs through Young Audiences, even parochial schools. But since Beacon Street can bring the gospel into play in faith-based schools, those principals can ask for and expect scriptural stories and references. As always, we will build a program to meet or exceed your stated needs. Only one thing is required:

YAGA TAWAN TABOOKUS.