

## **Bullying and Bullets: Lessons from School Shooting Cases**

### **PURPOSE**

To examine the effect of bullying in school shooter cases, to explore the false assumptions and truths related to the causes behind such cases, and to develop an opinion on Zero-Tolerance Policies within the public school system.

### **GRADE LEVELS**

Upper Middle and High School

### **CONTENT AREAS**

English/Language Arts  
Social Studies/Social Science

### **TIME**

45-70 minutes or  
One class period

### **STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

- Students will define the term profile.
- Students will determine similarities and differences between school shooter cases.
- Students will develop and support a position on a controversial issue..

### **PSAE/ACT SKILLS**

Identifying Main Ideas  
Identifying Patterns  
Developing a Position

### **STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS**

English Language Arts State Goals 3B, 3C, 4B  
Social Sciences State Goals 14E, 16A

### **LEARNING STYLES**

Interpersonal  
Logical/Mathematical  
Verbal/Linguistic

### **MATERIALS**

School Shooter Profiles  
Zero-Tolerance Policies and Rebuttal Quotes Handout  
10 Myths Handout  
Chart paper or whiteboard

### **VOCABULARY**

Profile  
Rebuttal

### **ASSESSMENT**

Zero-Tolerance Opinion Paragraph

### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **Anticipatory Set**

Ask students to think of any school shooting cases they are familiar with and generate a list of qualities or characteristics they associate with the type of students who become school shooters. You may wish to prompt students with the following questions: (**Variation:** Accommodate **Visual Learners** by offering the option to draw a person or images associated with the person instead of listing words)

- What does the person look like?
- Who does the person hang out with?
- From what type of family and socio-economic background does the person come?
- What are the person's interests and hobbies?
- What kind of video games, music, and movies does this person enjoy?
- What is this person's educational background/how do they perform in school?
- What motivates this person to kill?
- Where does this person obtain the weapons used to commit the crime?

### Lesson:

Ask students to share their responses and compile a class list on the board or on chart paper. Have students point out any recurring patterns or characteristics.

- Tell students that they will be examining specific cases of school shootings and will be determining if there is a typical "profile" of a school shooter.
- Examine dictionary definitions of "profile" and have students discuss to create a working definition of the term as a class. Something like the following will suffice.
  - **Profile: a representative sketch of a specific type of person, including typical characteristics and patterns**
- Split students into groups of 3-4 and give each group one of the **School Shooter Profiles** for consideration.
  - After students read about their shooter case, they should prepare to present the information about their case to the rest of the class. As groups share, ask students to refer back to their list of qualities to see if the case fits a "profile"
- After each group has shared, ask students to Think-Pair-Share (see Resource section below for more information on this method of instruction) on the following question:
 

*Is there a profile for the typical school shooter?*
- After checking in with student responses and discussing, point out to students that while there may be no profile for school shooters, there is one thing that all of them have in common: easy access to guns. For more about youth access to guns, access the **"Little Weapons"** lesson plan materials.
- Distribute the **10 Myths About School Shootings Handout** and read through as a class. Pause to discuss briefly after each myth.

### Debrief/Assessment:

- Using the **Zero-Tolerance Policies and Rebuttal Quotes Handout**, inform students of Zero-Tolerance policies which require schools to expel any student caught on campus with a firearm and in some cases, for possession of drugs and other weapons. Then ask students to identify the point each rebuttal quote is trying to make. (Depending on the group of students, it may be necessary to first define **Rebuttal**)
- Once students have identified the main idea of each quote, they must take a position and write a complete paragraph about whether they agree or disagree with Zero-Tolerance policies and why. Tell students to specifically refer to the rebuttal quotes and to also include a suggestion for what they believe can be done to address the problem of school shootings. Use the rubric below to assess students' paragraphs. In order to allow students to familiarize themselves with the rubric and guide their writing, this rubric appears on the bottom portion of the handout.
- Tell students that researchers believe that the key lies in improving communication in schools, dealing with bullying issues early on, and keeping guns away from children. In other words, adults need to listen to kids. This would be a great segue to encouraging students to let their voice be heard by participating in our **Student Voices Contest**.

\*Variation or possible extension activity: Using Michael Moore's documentary, **Bowling for Columbine**, expose students to the Columbine shooting case and engage them in a discussion about the ways this case established many of the school shooter stereotypes that exist today. This can be done by showing only portions of the film, or you can click here for a lesson plan that uses the **documentary** genre more extensively. This lesson focuses on Media Awareness and is ideal for the technology or multimedia classroom curriculum.

## RESOURCES:

### What Is Think-Pair-Share?

**Think-Pair-Share** is a cooperative discussion strategy developed by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in Maryland. It gets its name from the three stages of student action, with emphasis on what students are to be **DOING** at each of those stages.

### How Does It Work?

**1) Think.** Provoke students' thinking with a question or prompt or observation. The students should take a few moments (a minute or so) just to **THINK** about the question. You may wish to have them write instead of just thinking silently depending on your group of students.

**2) Pair.** Using designated partners, nearby neighbors, or a deskmate, students **PAIR** up to talk about the answer each came up with. They compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique. Encourage students to ask each other for elaboration or clarification and to add onto each other's points.

**3) Share.** After students talk in pairs for 1-2 minutes, the teacher calls for pairs to **SHARE** their thinking with the rest of the class. You can do this by going around in round-robin fashion, calling on each pair; or you can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board, overhead, or chart paper.

### Rubric: Zero-Tolerance Opinion Paragraph

	A	B	C
5	<b>Suggestion is a reasonable approach to addressing the problem of school shootings</b>	<b>Clearly states agreement or disagreement with Zero-tolerance policies</b>	<b>Supports opinion with specific, concrete evidence and relates to quote</b>
3	<b>Suggestion doesn't directly address the problem of school shootings</b>	<b>Agreement or disagreement with Zero-Tolerance policies is implied, but not directly stated</b>	<b>May not relate to the quote, and includes partially-effective evidence to support opinion</b>
1	<b>No clear suggestion or unreasonable for addressing the problem of school shootings</b>	<b>Does not declare either agreement or disagreement with policies, or declares both and argues both sides</b>	<b>Does not support opinion or attempts to do so in an illogical or contradictory manner</b>

**Total Points Possible: 15**

### Suggestions for Extension Activities:

1. You may wish to use this lesson as a way to begin or continue a conversation about stereotyping and prejudice.
2. Coordinate with a colleague in the math or science departments to simultaneously approach this issue from a statistical standpoint using **this lesson plan**.
3. Use this lesson plan as part of a literature or historical study involving the theme of bullying. For example, examine bullying on a larger, historical level through the study of the Holocaust and reading of the graphic novel, *Maus*, or Elie Wiesel's powerful memoir, *Night*. For younger students, *The Chocolate War* and *The Outsiders* also connect well with the theme of bullying.
4. You may wish to address the more recent Virginia Tech shooting using media footage and other news sources as material.
5. Since many have pinpointed music as an influence toward violent acts, you might wish to use one of the **songs about gun violence** found here.