

BOOKS TO GROW WITH NEWSLETTER: APRIL 2005

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello! This month I am delighted to share with you a new book (and new author) who has a strong interest in how books can help children with issues, especially teasing and bullying. The book is *My Secret Bully*; the author is Trudy Ludwig. After you've read what she has to say, check out her website at www.mysecretbully.com.

I've posted new book recommendations at the Lutra Press website at <http://www.lutrapress.com/idea/> as well. This month, the books I recommend are hot off the press – just released 2005 publications. Happy reading!

AN INTERVIEW WITH TRUDY LUDWIG

Introduction: Trudy Ludwig was already a writer when her daughter, Allie, then seven years old, was bullied at school. As Trudy searched for resources to help her daughter, she was dissatisfied with the availability of books dealing with relational aggression suitable for elementary school kids. So, she wrote *My Secret Bully*, a book which has received national attention.

Cheryl: Hello Trudy! Welcome to the *Books to Grow With* newsletter. Let's begin by talking about *My Secret Bully*. You've commented that your daughter's experience was the inspiration for the book. How does the plot mirror your own daughter's experience...and how is it different?

Trudy: In my daughter's case, it was not one friend but a group of friends whom she had known since kindergarten who turned against her. Over time, they sabotaged their relationships with one another through gossip, rumors and intentional exclusion. It all came to a head when, collectively as a group, they bullied my daughter on the playground during school recess. After the incident, some of the girls took responsibility for their bullying behaviors and tried to make right their wrongs; others didn't.

Cheryl: Along with being a great story, *My Secret Bully* gives us a window into issues that many kids experience. What do you see as the role of good books in helping kids?

Trudy: *My Secret Bully* gives a voice to children who have experienced social cruelty and helps them to connect with others—both young and old—who share similar stories. It also empowers children to make healthier friendship choices by modeling that it's okay to let go of those friends who don't appreciate them for who they are and the goodness they have to offer.

Cheryl: Some reviewers have used the term "bibliotherapy" when they discuss your book. Do you agree with that characterization?

Trudy: Most definitely. In fact, I purposely wrote this book to be used as a bibliotherapeutic tool to help children cope with the difficult issue of relational

aggression (emotional bullying hidden within friendship networks). In my presentations to schools around the country, I define bibliotherapy, as well as explain its process and benefits—using *My Secret Bully* as a walk-through example.

Cheryl: What’s your definition of bibliotherapy – and what do you think of its role with children?

Trudy: Bibliotherapy is the use of books as an adjunct therapeutic tool to help children understand and cope with emotional /social problems. It helps to instill critical thinking skills in young readers by allowing them to identify with the characters of a story and acquire greater insight into their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Simply speaking, it paves the way to greater understanding and empathy for oneself and others.

Cheryl: Along the way when you were searching for good resources, did you come across other bullying books you would recommend?

Trudy: Yes I did. Some of my top fiction picks are: *The Meanest Thing To Say* by Bill Cosby; *Simon’s Hook* by Karen Gedig Burnett; *Hey Little Ant* by Phillip and Hanna Hoose; *Mr. Peabody’s Apples* by Madonna; *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes; *The Skin I’m In* by Sharon Flake; *Don’t Laugh At Me* by Steve Seskin, as well as *Crash*, *Loser*, *Stargirl*, and *Wringer*—all written by Jerry Spinelli.

For nonfiction, some of my top picks are: *Stop Picking on Me* by Pat Thomas; *Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem* by Gershen Kaufman, Ph.D.; *Bullies Are a Pain in the Brain* by Trevor Romain; *Cliques, Phonies & Other Baloney* by Trevor Romain; and *How To Handle Bullies, Teasers and Other Meanies: A Book that Takes the Nuisance Out of Name Calling and Other Nonsense* by Kate Cohen-Posey.

Cheryl: What resources have you provided so that classroom teachers or librarians can use *My Secret Bully* for group or one-on-one reading to help kids understand this experience? Can you tell us something about how they have used your book?

Trudy: My book includes helpful tips, discussion questions, as well as a list of organizations, anti-bullying websites, and recommended readings for adults and children who want more information about this topic.

Many teachers and librarians are using *My Secret Bully* as a supplemental tool for their schools’ social skills / character education / anti-bullying curriculums. An administrator of Special Education in Rhode Island wrote: “When we used *My Secret Bully* as a read-aloud to the entire class, the kids began to recognize themselves in the characters and understand the implications of their behaviors. The story was a catalyst for many significant ‘teaching moments,’ when children eagerly seized the opportunity to share their own similar experiences and feelings.”

Cheryl: Are there other topics you think deserve a good children's book that you hope to write?

Trudy: There is always room for more character education books in our children's lives—particularly books that help teach empathy and social skills.

Cheryl: Can you share a bit about your next book?

Trudy: My next picture book, *Just Kidding* (Tricycle Press), will be available in 2006. I wrote the book to help young readers understand when teasing is no laughing matter. The story is about what happens when one boy's teasing goes too far and what can be done about it.

Cheryl: Finally, I am always curious to find out -- who were your favorite children's authors, when you were young? And, who have been your favorite authors for the books you chose for your children?

Trudy: When I was a child, I loved Road Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. I also loved Dr. Seuss books and Munro Leaf's *The Story of Ferdinand*. My favorite authors for my children include those I've enjoyed as a child. I also love reading to my children the works of Barbara Park, David Shannon, Shel Silverstein, and Kate DiCamillo.

Cheryl: Trudy, thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you!

Trudy: It has been my pleasure.

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