

# EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

## A WORD ABOUT USING THESE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

In a film about writing for children, American children's author and illustrator David Small offered the following advice: "Write about the things that keep you up at night."

I took Small's advice to heart and began working on a novel whose subject still keeps me up at night: my own experience as a teenager in an abusive project. I transformed those difficult memories into my 2013 YA novel, *So Much It Hurts* (Orca Book Publishers).

The exercises that follow are based on student writing published in the 2014 edition of *Quebec Roots*, a Blue Metropolis Literary Foundation project that allows youngsters across Quebec to tell their stories through words and photographs.

The excerpts explore difficult issues such as living with a disability, bullying, shame and secrets. The accompanying writing prompts are designed to help students tell their own stories about facing hardships, and also to help them "step into the shoes" of other characters. Stories about bullying tend to be told from the point of view of the victim, but there is value in considering other vantage points as well. What is the bully's story? And if there is a witness, what is his or her story?

Literature can entertain and enlighten us. But perhaps most of all, it is a way for us to gain a greater sense of compassion – by stepping out of our own lives, and experiencing other existences.

Teachers are encouraged to do the following exercises along with their students. By doing so, teachers model that we are all writers and that all of our stories matter.

"Writing is an effective strategy  
when one needs to cope with  
negative experiences because  
it helps a person make sense  
of them and to get past them."

– Sonja Lyvbomirsky

Professor of Psychology, University of California

Monique Polak, November 2014



# EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES BASED ON EXCERPTS FROM 2014 *QUEBEC ROOTS* PROJECT

## 1. "JUSTIN'S PICK-ME-UPS" (MACKAY CHAPTER)

We all face challenges. That is particularly true for young people with physical handicaps. Justin Febrile is confined to a wheelchair. In his poem, "Justin's Pick-me-ups," Justin gives concrete examples of challenges he faces in daily life. What most young people would consider ordinary outings, such as going out for souvlaki, or to the mall, are major challenges for Justin and his classmates at Mackay Centre School.

Find someone in your school or community who has a physical disability. Perhaps the person needs crutches or a wheelchair to get around. Interview that person. Ask the person to tell you about the challenges associated with being in a wheelchair. Also ask about how other kids –especially those who do not use wheelchairs – treat him or her. You should also ask whether your interview subject can suggest ways in which other kids can be more helpful to youngsters with disabilities. Be sure to take notes. Transcribe your interview, then present your findings to your class.

In his poem, Justin describes how, because the souvlaki restaurant was not wheelchair- accessible, he had to wait outside while his mom went to get him a sandwich. Imagine that you were outside the souvlaki restaurant, too. Imagine that you and Justin got to talking about yourselves and the challenges you each face. Write a dialogue in which you and Justin compare notes about your lives. Is there a lesson for you in Justin's experience and in his positive attitude? If so, work that into your dialogue.

## 2. "LESS BULLYING" BY SAM HACHEM (WILLINGDON SCHOOL)

In "Less Bullying," Sam Hachem writes about how he was bullied in the schoolyard. Being victimized by a bully makes us feel vulnerable and angry at the same time. Imagine that you are a boy like Sam – or perhaps a girl named Samantha – and that you are fed up with being bullied. Write a letter to your bully in which you describe how being bullied makes you feel. Be sure to express both your sense of vulnerability as well as your anger.

Literature about bullying often focuses on the experience of the victim. But there are other people involved in bullying situations. There is, of course, the bully, and there is often also a witness. Imagine you are Sam's bully. Write a letter to Sam in which you explain how you, too, have been bullied, perhaps at home or in your neighbourhood. Or imagine that you were a witness to Sam's encounter with the bully. Write a dialogue in which you stand up for your friend Sam, and the bully turns on you. Try to come up with a hopeful ending to your conversation with the bully.

### 3. "MUSIC FOR MY DAD" BY JASPER ROUND

In her poem "Music for My Dad," Jasper Round is not ready to tell her dad that she is gay. Instead, she uses music to communicate her message. We sense that Jasper's dad is beginning to understand the secret his daughter wishes to share with him. Secrets make for powerful stories, poem and songs. Write the lyrics for a song in which a young person shares a secret about him or herself. The secret could have to do with sexuality, like Jasper's secret, but you can also come up with other sorts of secrets. Some suggestions include having been bullied, having been a bully, or having been a witness who did not stand up to bullying.

How would you feel if your best friend told you he or she was gay? Write an imaginary diary entry from the point of view of a young person whose best friend has shared this secret. Is the revelation a surprise or did you see it coming? What impact does the revelation have on you? Explore all these questions in your diary entry.