

# A Teacher's Guide to **THE FALL** and **BYSTANDER**

by **JAMES PRELLER**

FOR  
USE WITH  
COMMON CORE  
STATE  
STANDARDS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**JAMES PRELLER** is the author of the popular Jigsaw Jones mystery books, which have sold more than 10 million copies since 1998. He is also the author of *Bystander*, named a 2009 Junior Library Guild Selection, *Six Innings*, an ALA Notable Book, and *Mighty Casey*, his own twist on the classic poem, “Casey at the Bat.” In addition to writing full-time, Preller plays in a men’s hardball league and coaches Little League. He compares coaching kids to “trying to hold the attention of a herd of earthworms.” He lives in Delmar, New York, with his wife, three children, cats, and a dog.

## ABOUT THE BOOK



*“Nobody knows who said that horrible thing.”* Told through a teen boy’s journal entries, the story of Morgan Mallen slowly comes together like distinct pieces of a great puzzle. Sam Proctor recounts the events of the past year—a story of friendship, bullying, and tragedy. At first, Sam thought it was funny to post a cruel comment on Morgan’s social media page. It was just a game, after all—wasn’t it? A game orchestrated by Morgan’s former best friend, Athena, who is also a powerful ring leader. But after Sam befriends Morgan and starts spending time with her outside of school, the price of anonymous cruelty becomes all too real. Ultimately Sam is forced to confront his actions to earn back whatever forgiveness might remain.

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E-book: 9781250066473

To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities in this guide to their classes’ needs. You know your kids best!



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# QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What motivates Athena's attack on Morgan? Why is Athena able to convince others to write such hurtful posts on Morgan's page?
2. Why is Sam attracted to Morgan? Why doesn't he want to talk to her? What does Sam learn about Morgan as a result of their relationship?
3. When Jeff tells Sam that Morgan likes the attention she is receiving from her web page, how does Jeff justify his opinion? What is Sam's response to Jeff's opinion?
4. When Sam and Morgan finally begin to spend time together, who discovers their relationship? How do Sam and Morgan react to each other when they are discovered?
5. How does Jeff betray Sam? How does Sam betray Morgan? How does Athena betray Morgan?
6. What is Sam's reaction when he is harassed at school for liking Morgan? Why does he feel like such a coward?
7. How does Sam feel after Fergus punches him? How does Sam explain his reaction to being punched?
8. How is Athena's life affected by Morgan's suicide? What are Athena's regrets?
9. How does writing in a journal help Sam come to terms with his feelings surrounding Morgan's suicide?
10. What was Sam hoping to gain by apologizing to Morgan's sister, Sophie? How does she react?
11. What does Sophie reveal to Sam about Morgan that helps alleviate some of his guilt? What are the other factors that contributed to Morgan's suicide?
12. What steps does the school take to help the students deal with the death of Morgan? How do the counselors help the students?
13. Why does Sophie send Sam a gift? What is the gift? What does it mean to Sam to have the gift?
14. How does Morgan's suicide change Sam's life from wanting to be somebody else on page 20 to becoming "I am Sam, Sam I am" on page 192?
15. What clues does the title give the reader about the subject of the book? In the end, what meanings does the title bring to the story?

**CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, and L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**CCSS: L.6.2, L.7.2, and L.8.2** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CCSS: L.6.3, L.7.3, and L.8.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

**CCSS: RL.6.1, RL.7.1, and RL.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**CCSS: SL.6.1, SL.7.1, and SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.



# ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

## ◆ Will the Real Morgan Please Stand Up?

Most of the characters have had some interaction with Morgan and have something to say about her. Ask half of the class to write a character analysis of Morgan based on what others say about her. Have the other half of the class write a character analysis based on what Sam discovers about Morgan, what Morgan reveals about herself, and what Morgan's sister says about her. Then have students work with a partner to compare the two essays and to write about what they can learn or glean about the difference in the two analyses. Post the two character analyses side-by-side on the classroom bulletin board.

## ◆ Sam's Journey from Guilt to Acceptance

On pages 14 and 15, Sam describes being numb and his feelings of guilt as a result of Morgan's suicide. Ask students to make a timeline of Sam's emotional journey from the time of Morgan's suicide to his acceptance of her death. At each point on the timeline, ask students to write a brief explanation of how that event impacts Sam's healing. Display the timelines in the classroom.

## ◆ A Few of My Favorite Things

Ask students to read pages 156–157, and using those pages as a mentor text, ask students to write a similar list about things and events they like. Challenge students to select one entry off their original list and to create a second focused list of aspects of the focused topic. Have students share both lists with others in the class.

## ◆ Forgiveness

On page 178, Sam talks to Athena at the mall. Athena says she never forgave Morgan but Sam replies that no one forgives Athena, proving that sometimes you receive what you give. Ask students to work with a partner to write a poem-for-two voices about the power of forgiveness. Through the two voices, students should address how the outcome of both Morgan's and Athena's life would have been different if forgiveness could have occurred. Another predominant theme in *The Fall* is betrayal. Athena betrays Morgan; Jeff betrays Sam; and Sam betrays Morgan. Students could also work with a partner and choose to write a poem-for-two voices about betrayal and the pain it creates using one of these sets of characters. Have students share their poems with the class.

**CCSS: 6.2, W.7.2, and W.8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**CCSS: W.6.3, W.7.3, and W.8.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS: W.6.4, W.7.4, and W.8.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, and L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

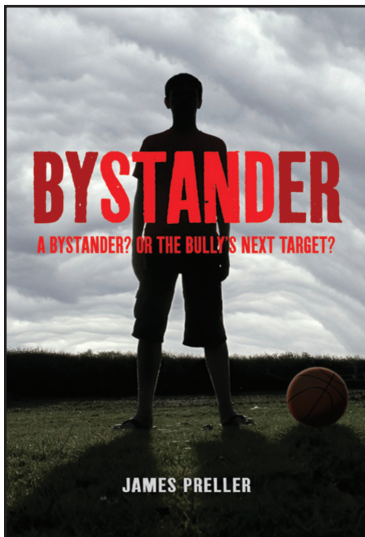
**CCSS: L.6.2, L.7.2, and L.8.2** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CCSS: L.6.3, L.7.3, and L.8.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

**CCSS: L.6.5, L.7.5, and L.8.5** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.



# ABOUT THE BOOK



Ages 10–14 • 9780312547967  
E-book: 9781429954969

When Eric and his family move to Long Island from Ohio, Eric is nervous about attending junior high with kids he doesn't know. Before school starts he has a chance meeting with Griffin and his pals. Eric is relieved when Griffin asks him to sit at their table during lunch, but Eric begins to sense that Griffin may not be the best choice for a friend. He makes jokes about David, a student who wants to be in Griffin's clique, and later Griffin physically hurts David. Eric finally sees Griffin for who he is: a bully, a liar, and a thief. But when Eric separates himself from Griffin, Eric soon becomes Griffin's next target. As the situation escalates, Eric draws on help from his family, friends, and the school administration to avoid being Griffin's next best punching bag.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How does Eric's first interaction with Griffin set the tone for their future relationship? What characteristics does Griffin possess that make him a leader?
2. How does Eric feel about his father leaving the family? What does Eric come to understand about his father's reasons for leaving?
3. What are the two sides of Griffin's personality? How does he use them to his advantage?
4. What role does Griffin's father play in Griffin's life? How has his father affected his personality and his life?
5. Why does Eric refer to Griffin as "terrorism in jeans"? (Page 85)
6. What makes David Hallenback so easy to bully? How does Griffin use David to his advantage?
7. Why does Griffin continue to threaten Eric? How does Eric respond to Griffin's threats?
8. What occurs that forces Eric to see that he is just as bad for not standing up to Griffin as Griffin is for being a bully?
9. How are Eric's and Mary's situations similar? What do Eric and Mary learn about themselves and each other as they deal with the bullies in their lives?
10. How do Eric and Mary attempt to distance themselves from their former "friends"? What good comes from their choosing to take a stand?
11. Why does Griffin turn on Eric and have him beat up? Who does Griffin use to do his dirty work?
12. How does Eric's mother react to his beating? What happens at school as a result of the fight?
13. What role do the school officials play in stopping the bullying? What could they have done to be more proactive in preventing the bullies' reign of terror?
14. In the end, who are the winners? What characters changed during the course of the novel's events? How do they change?



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**CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, and L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**CCSS: L.6.3, L.7.3, and L.8.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

**CCSS: SL.6.1, SL.7.1, and SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### ◆ The Pain of Mental Illness

Eric's father suffers from the mental illness schizophrenia. As so many other young people whose family members suffer from a mental illness, Eric and his family endure consequences along with his father. Ask students to research schizophrenia or to select another mental health disorder to research such as: depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobic behavior, or others. Have students investigate how the selected disorder affects the mind and body, as well as the symptoms, the medication, and the long-term prognosis of the disease. Then have students create a brochure for family members dealing with a loved one's mental illness. Have students provide their brochures to a local mental health facility to help the family members of those who suffer from mental illness.

### ◆ Bullying

Among school-age students, the majority have been bullied, have bullied someone else, or have witnessed bullying in their lifetime. Ask students to write about a time they had an experience with bullying and then in small groups have students share their experiences. Have each group discuss ways bullying can be avoided, ways to respond when bullied, and ways to talk with peers who may be bullying others. Students should also look at life from the perspective of "the bully." What happens in a kid's life that makes him want to be mean to others? Have each group write, practice, and present a skit over one of the scenarios they have discussed.

### ◆ No Bully Zone

Numerous anti-bullying products and programs are available for schools to use to help stop bullying, but bullying continues. Part of the problem is that adults, including parents, don't always know about the bullying. In small groups, ask students to create an informative anti-bullying PowerPoint presentation. The presentation should include the following: signs that indicate a child may be being bullied or may be bullying others, steps parents and administrators can take to stop the bullying, and a list of web pages and other resources that offer help to both parents and students. Have students present the PowerPoint presentations at all parent meetings, school registrations, open-house, and other parent events. In addition, post selected PowerPoint presentations on the district website.

**CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, and W.8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**CCSS: W.6.3, W.7.3, and W.8.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS: W.6.4, W.7.4, and W.8.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS: W.6.7, W.7.7, and W.8.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question.

**CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, and L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.



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TEACHER'S GUIDE  
Books by James Preller

# OVERALL THEMES IN *THE FALL AND BYSTANDER*

## ◆ Bullying

- What similar characteristics do both Griffin and Athena possess?
- How do they use their power to influence others to bully?
- How do the victims, David and Morgan, respond to the bullying?
- What is the key for changing from being a bystander like Mary, Eric, and Sam to being someone who steps in?
- What role do parents and school administrators play in stopping the bullying?

## ◆ Family Relationships

- What role do the families of Griffin and Athena play in the raising of a bully?
- How do the families of the victims react to the news that their child is being bullied?
- How do the victims' families support their child or sibling?

## ◆ Friendships

- As a result of the bullying, how are new friendships formed by Eric, Mary, and Sam?
- How are other students affected by the new relationships?
- How do Athena and Griffin respond to the change in their friendships?

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**CCSS: L.6.3, L.7.3, and L.8.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

**CCSS: SL.6.1, SL.7.1, and SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Using a Venn diagram for prewriting, ask students to work with a partner to compare and contrast one of the main characters from both *Bystander* and *The Fall*. In addition, have students consider and add to the Venn diagram how the themes, plot events, and conflict resolutions impact the characters. Then have students write a poem-for-two-voices that compares the two selected main characters. Have students practice and present their poems to the class.

**CCSS: W.6.2, W.7.2, and W.8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**CCSS: W.6.3, W.7.3, and W.8.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS: W.6.4, W.7.4, and W.8.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS: W.6.7, W.7.7, and W.8.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question.

**CCSS: L.6.1, L.7.1, and L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

For a detailed description of the common core standards used in this guide please visit [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

Common Core activities written by Susan Geye, Everman ISD Coordinator of Library Services



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