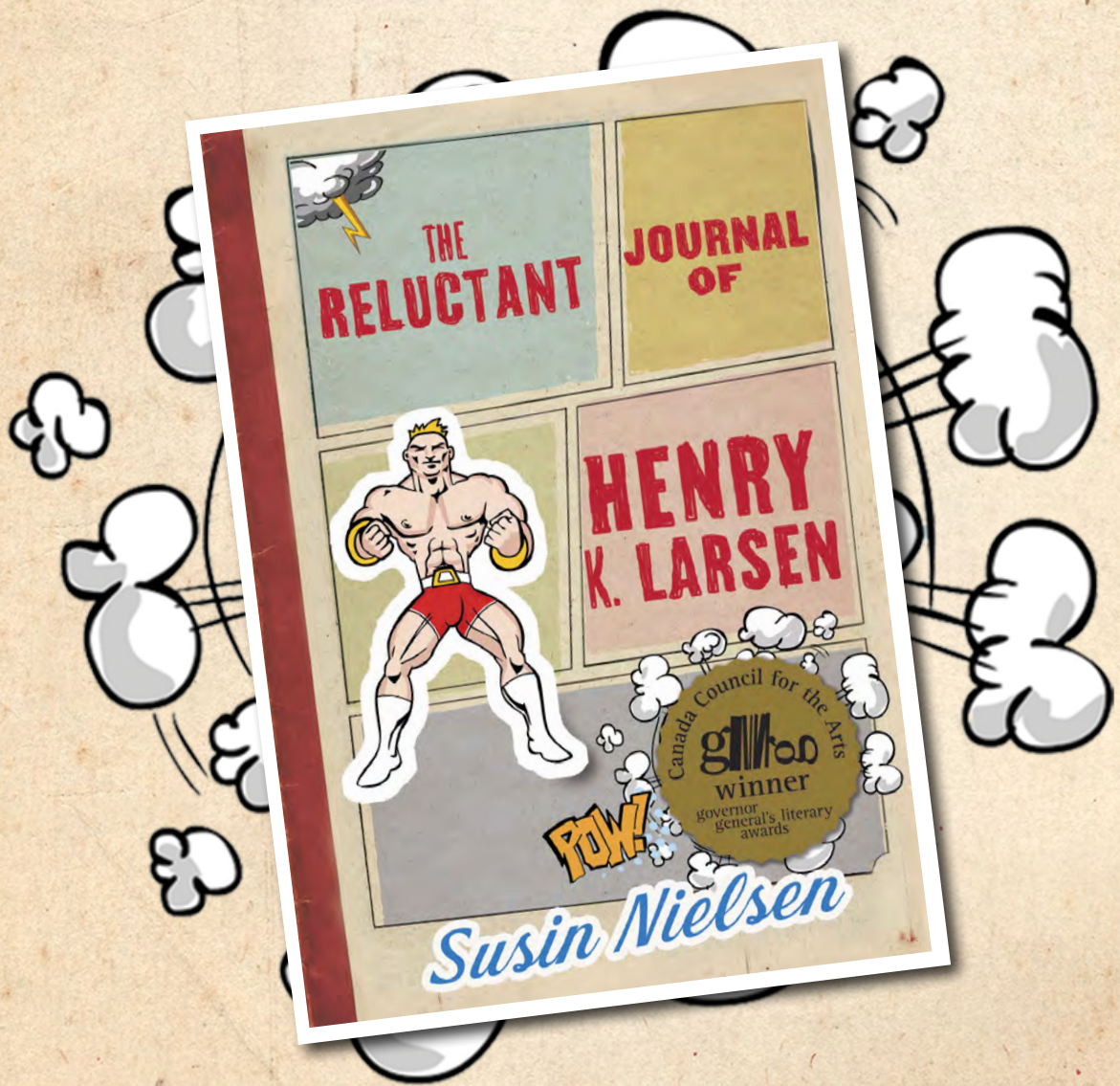


THE RELUCTANT JOURNAL of HENRY K. LARSEN

SUSIN NIELSEN



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



TUNDRA BOOKS
www.tundrabooks.com

DEAR EDUCATOR

Susin Nielsen has created a fantastic new character in Henry, whose journal entries are infused with humor and provide a riveting read about a family in turmoil. The novel explores a very real problem plaguing every school campus across North America: bullying. A sensitive and emotionally charged topic, Susin Nielsen's book can be used as an important springboard for the classroom and whole school conversations that need to occur if appropriate action is to be taken to eliminate bullying behavior from our schools.

Teachers can use the text in a number of ways, including:

- Exploring conceptual and thematic connections such as acceptance, family, forgiveness, friendship, healing, humor and perspective
- Investigating first person narrative vs. third person narrative
- Conducting an in-depth study of character development
- Exploring both the overt and hidden aspects and consequences of bullying behavior.

The activity guide that follows includes discussion questions, writing activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text. Where applicable, activities have been aligned with Common Core State Standards. The activities can be used for a Social Studies and Language Arts unit or can be used as stand alone enrichment in whole class and/or small group novel studies.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Thirteen-year-old Henry's happy, ordinary life comes to an abrupt halt when his older brother, Jesse, picks up their father's hunting rifle and leaves the house one morning. What follows shatters Henry's family, who are forced to resume their lives in a new city, where no one knows their past. When Henry's therapist suggests he keep a journal, at first he is resistant. But soon he confides in it at all hours of the day and night.

In spite of Henry's desire to "fly under the radar," he eventually befriends a number of oddball characters, both at school and in his modest apartment building. And even though they know nothing about his past—at least, not yet—they help him navigate the waters of life after "IT."

Susin Nielsen peoples this novel about the ultimate cost of bullying with a cast of fabulous characters, dark humor and a lovable, difficult protagonist struggling to come to terms with the horrible crime his brother has committed.

CRUNCH!

PRE-READING DISCUSSION

1. Teachers: Introduce the narrative mode (and point of view) that the author uses to tell the story. Conduct a classroom discussion with the following prompts:
 - Have you ever written in a journal? If so, why did you write in the journal? If not, why do you think others may want to write in a journal?
 - Can you think of any other novels that have been written in this way? Or any novels that included journal writing as a part of the narrative?
 - What are some common elements of a journal entry? (Written in first person, dated, sequential, etc.)
2. Look up the meaning of "reluctant" in the dictionary. Why do you think the novel is called, *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen*?
3. As a class, create a mind map of what the students think of when they hear the word, "bully." This mind map will be revisited later to see how their thinking has evolved or changed.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. MY RELUCTANT JOURNAL

Teachers: As your students read the novel, either as a class, in small groups or individually, allow them to keep a reader's response journal. Since the book is not divided up into chapters but rather journal entries, a good rule of thumb is that students should be making an entry in their journal after reading every twenty pages or so. The journal can be a traditional pen and paper book, typed on a computer or can take the form of an online blog.

Some guiding prompts for your students to consider when writing include:

- How has the plot advanced?
- Were any new characters introduced?
- Was there any new vocabulary?
- Did the story remind me of anything? Did I make any personal connections? Did I have an emotional response to what happened?
- What will happen next?
- What do I hope will happen next?
- Was my prediction correct from my last journal entry?
- Do I have any questions about what I read?

2. THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY

- What does the phrase, "there are two sides to every story" mean? This novel is told from the perspective of Henry through his journal entries. Journal entries are typically written in first person and reflect the personal thoughts and feelings of the writer. Using the T-chart provided, brainstorm three advantages and three disadvantages of telling a story using this type of narration.
- Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in this manner? Do you agree with the author's decision to use this narrative technique? Support your opinion citing at least three reasons for your thinking.
- How would telling the story in first person traditional narration differ from telling the story in first person narration through journal entries? (Hint: think of past and present tenses.)

(RL.6.6, RL.7.6)

3. RELIABLE VS. UNRELIABLE NARRATION

- Narrators can be reliable, unreliable or sometimes both within the same story. What is a reliable narrator? What is an unreliable narrator? Can you think of an example of an unreliable narrator?
- Do you think that Henry was a reliable or unreliable narrator? Explain your thinking.
- How might the story be different had it been told in third person narration? Support your opinion citing at least three reasons for your thinking.

(RH.6-8.6)

4. CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

- Select one major event from the story. Reread Henry's journal entry describing that event. Write a new journal entry describing the same event from the perspective of one of the other characters involved. How might this affect the way a reader understands and processes that event?
- Select an event or series of events from the story. Without looking at the text, rewrite the event in third person narrative. Try to include details that were not in Henry's journal entries, but don't change any essential details of the plot. Again, how might this affect the way a reader interprets the events of the novel?

(RL.5.6, W.6.3)

5. CHARACTER TRAITS

- Journal entries allow the reader to get a personal glimpse into a character's thoughts and feelings. What are three character traits Henry displays that although not explicitly described in the text, are evident from reading his journal entries? Use the graphic organizer provided to organize your thoughts and provide proof of your thinking.

(RL.6.1, RL.7.1)

6. HUMOR

- Although the novel deals with some very serious themes, there is quite a bit of humor in many of Henry's journal entries. Locate three examples of humor in the text.
- Why do you think the author chose to write about the GWF and not some other sport? What role did it play in the narrative?

(RL.6.4)

SMASH!

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)

7. SYMPATHY VS. EMPATHY

- Using a dictionary, describe the difference between the words, “sympathy” and “empathy.”
- Jodie was Henry’s best friend before he moved to Vancouver. They had a special friendship. In what way might these two characters sympathize and empathize with one another?
- Think about how Jesse’s actions would have impacted Jodie and Henry. How might they have similar and different feelings as a result of the same event? Use the Venn diagram provided to record your thoughts.
- Scott, Jesse’s bully, was also Jodie’s older brother. Jodie looked up to her brother. Why do you think the author chose to show this gentler side of the bully, instead of just focusing on his negative qualities? Write a paragraph in which you either question or support this portrayal.

(W.5.1, L.6.4c)

8. HEALING

- Karen was one of Henry’s neighbors in the building. The first few times that they met, Henry and Karen did not like each other. Over time, Henry came to somewhat rely on Karen to help him heal. Discuss the evolution of their relationship and how ultimately, they may have helped each other heal from their personal trauma.

(RL.6.4)

9. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- Look up the word, “stereotype” in the dictionary. Record the definition in your own words and give an example.
- What was Henry’s first impression of Farley? What did he base this impression on? Find examples in the text to support your answer.
- How did Henry’s feelings about Farley change over the course of the novel? What made him change his mind? What lesson can be learned from the development of Henry’s friendship with Farley?
- Locate and quote three other examples in the story where Henry stereotyped people. Explain in writing, citing examples from the text, how Henry’s thinking changed about these three characters, and as a result, how his behavior changed throughout the story. Use the graphic organizer provided to organize your thinking.

(RL.6.1, RL.6.3, L.6.4c, RL.7.2)

10. BULLIES, VICTIMS, AND BYSTANDERS

- Write a short paragraph that explains what it means to be bullied. Share your writing in small groups, and then together use the graphic organizer provided to brainstorm the different forms bullying can take. Keep in mind that not all bullying can be easily observed. What kind of bullying took place in the novel?
- Have you or somebody you know ever been a victim of bullying? In a private journal-style entry of your own, write about this experience or what you know of somebody else’s experience. If you don’t know of somebody personally, you can write about a character in the novel. You may choose to share this journal entry with classmates or keep it private. How did the bullying make you or the victim feel?
- “When somebody is bullied, the only people involved are the bully and the victim.” In partners, discuss this statement. Do you agree with it? Why/why not?
- Bullying affects more than the victim alone and can have far-reaching consequences. List all of the people affected by bullying in the novel, both the aggressors and the victims, and those not directly involved in the bullying but still impacted by it (teachers, siblings, bystanders, etc.). Use the three-column T-chart provided to record your list.
- There were people who were aware that Jesse was a victim of bullying. Why do you think that they didn’t intervene? Choose three different characters in the novel that were in a position to know about Jesse’s struggles, and think about why they weren’t able to, or chose not to, help. Using a think-pair-share, discuss your thinking with your classmates.

(W.6.3d)

11. CHANGING OUTCOMES

- Henry’s parents blamed each other for what happened with Jesse. Henry himself felt responsible. Do you think the tragedy in the novel could have been prevented? If so, how? If not, why not? Refer to characters and events in the story to support your reasoning.

(RL.6.1)

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

(CONTINUED)

12. IN THREE WORDS ...

- When Henry goes to visit his mother in Picton, he describes his teachers and friends to her with short descriptors. Choose three characters from the book and carefully select three words that would accurately describe each of them. Locate evidence from the text that justifies the words you have selected. Use the graphic organizer provided to organize your ideas.
- Extension: Randomly select a classmate's name out of a hat. Choose three words to describe your classmate (only positive descriptors!). Present your three words to the class and ask your classmates to guess who you are describing. Explain why you chose each of the three words, giving examples of their behavior that justify your selection.

13. HAIKU

- One of Henry's journal entries recounts the poems he wrote for English class on Valentine's Day. Haikus, as Henry explains, are ". . . super-short poems, unrhymed—first line, five syllables; second line, seven syllables, third line, five syllables." Compose a haiku of your own about one aspect of the novel that had an impact on you.

14. REACH FOR THE TOP!

- In small groups, create a Reach for the Top trivia game with questions about the novel. Include questions about plot, characterization, narrative mode and questions about the author.
- Combine small groups and challenge each group to play the other's Reach for the Top trivia game!

WRAP UP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Revisit the bully mind map created in the pre-reading activities. Is there anything you would now omit or include in the mind map?
2. Has your thinking changed at all with respect to bullying in schools? If so, how? If not, did the story confirm any of your previous beliefs?
3. In order to reflect on the novel, allow students the opportunity to review what they have written in their reluctant journals and to share their writing with their peers.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. THE BULLY DANCE

- Watch the short film produced by the National Film Board of Canada called, *The Bully Dance* (http://www.nfb.ca/film/bully_dance). Discuss how the animated film, without dialogue, tells the story of a character who is hurt by a bully and his friends.
- Think of Farley and his experiences with the bully. In a small group, create a dance that tells the story of Farley's experiences. Assign a specific role to each of the people in the dance (i.e., Farley, Henry, Reach for the Top kids, the bully, his friends, Henry's parents, vice-principal, etc.). *The Bully Dance* is able to convey the thoughts and feelings of the characters without dialogue. How can you convey what Farley and the other characters were doing/feeling using movement and facial expressions?

2. MEMORY BOX

- Henry and Jesse's mom kept a memory box full of keepsakes from their childhood. Everything included in the box had a special memory attached to it. If you were to create a memory box from your childhood, what would you include in it? Use a shoebox and collect items that are important to you. If you don't want to include an item, or you don't have the item anymore, draw a picture of it and include it in your box. Alternatively, create a virtual memory box with pictures and images that represent your special memories. Present your memory box in partners, small groups, or to the class.

3. RECYCLING IN THE COMMUNITY

- Henry and Farley collect cans and bottles from their school recycling bins to raise money so they can buy tickets to the GWF show. Research the local recycling program in your community and prepare a short slideshow presentation or poster board that outlines the different stages involved in recycling cans and bottles in your community, beginning with when the bottle or can is first thrown away.

(W.6.7)





Photo Credit: Tallulah Photography

SUSIN NIELSEN got her start feeding cast and crew on the popular television series, *Degrassi Junior High*. They hated her food, but they saw a spark in her writing. Nielsen went on to pen sixteen episodes of the hit TV show. Since then, Nielsen has written for many TV series, including *Arctic Air*, *Heartland*, *Cedar Cove*, *Madison*, *Ready or Not*, *Edgemont*, *What About Mimi*, *Franny's Feet* and *Braceface*. She also adapted author Susan Juby's book, *Alice, I Think*, into a TV series, and co-created and executive produced the critically-acclaimed comedy-drama, *Robson Arms*.

Nielsen has also published three children's books: *Hank and Fergus*, winner of the Mr. Christie's Silver Medal Award, *Mormor Moves In*, and *The Magic Beads*. Her first young adult novel, *Word Nerd*, was published by Tundra in 2008 to critical acclaim, and went on to win many awards, including Ontario's Red Maple, and the Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards. It was also nominated for the TD Children's Book of the Year Award.

Her second novel, *Dear George Clooney: Please Marry My Mom*, hit stores in August 2010 to great reviews, and also scooped up a bunch of Young Readers' Choice nominations and awards. *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen*, published in August 2012, won the Governor General's Literary Award, the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Award, and the Canadian Library Association's Children's Book of the Year, among others. Her books have been translated into Italian, Portuguese, French, German, and—soon—South Korean. She lives in Vancouver with her family and two naughty cats.

Please visit www.susinnielsen.com and www.randomhouse.ca

LINKS:

STOP A BULLY: <http://stopabully.ca>

PACER'S National Bully Prevention Centre: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

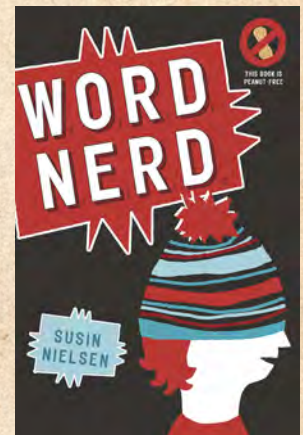
NEA's Bully Free, It Starts With Me: <http://www.nea.org/home/neabullyfree.html>

KID'S HELP PHONE: <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca>

THE YOUTH VOICE PROJECT: <http://www.youthvoiceproject.com/>
<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>



Other books by Susin Nielsen:

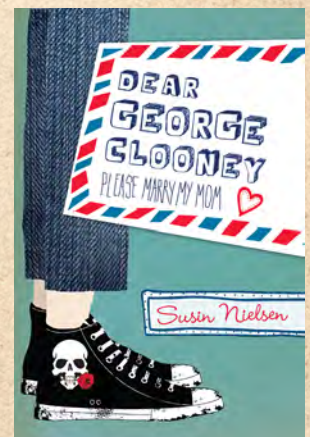


Word Nerd

HC 978-0-88776-875-0

TR 978-0-88776-990-0

eBook 978-1-77049-075-8



Dear George Clooney, Please Marry My Mom

HC 978-0-88776-977-1

TR 978-0-88776-990-0

eBook 978-0-88776-978-8

PRAISE FOR

THE RELUCTANT JOURNAL OF HENRY K. LARSEN

"...With fully developed adult and child characters and a solid sense of middle school humor, the author has crafted an insightful and nuanced novel about bullying and suicide, and familial love and resilience."

— Starred Review, *School Library Journal*

"... A realistic, poignant portrait of one teen who overcomes nearly unbearable feelings of grief and guilt."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"... A highly emotional story about a family that blames one another, and themselves, for an unimaginable tragedy. Nielsen's balance of humor and pathos is finely honed, making this a surprisingly breezy read for so heavy a topic."

— Daniel Kraus, *Booklist*

"Even while dealing with heartbreaking issues and frightening concerns, (Nielsen) manages to keep hope alive—and instills in her characters a survival instinct and a sense of humor that keeps them afloat It's no surprise that this remarkable book has been shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award. I fervently hope it wins."

— *Montreal Gazette*

"Henry is a likable, sympathetic protagonist, as are the supporting characters in the story. Nielsen injects enough humor into the story to sustain the drama of Henry's ordeal without making it too maudlin or morose, and the honesty with which he confronts his feelings in his journal is both disarming and endearing. A realistic, poignant portrait of one teen who overcomes nearly unbearable feelings of grief and guilt."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"You will just fall in love with Henry ... He is Nielsen's most authentic, hilarious character to date, which is really saying something because no one can write a middle grade character like Susin Nielsen ... So for those of you in the know about Susin Nielsen: this book lives up to everything you are expecting and more. For those of you who are Nielsen neophytes, stock up on her stuff now so you can share in my smugness."

— *George's Favorite Tooth* — *Tidbits on Books for Young People*

AWARDS FOR

THE RELUCTANT JOURNAL OF HENRY K. LARSEN

- Winner, Canada Council for the Arts' Governor General's Literary Award
- Winner, Canadian Library Association's Book of the Year for Children Award
- Winner, Ontario Arts Council's Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award
- Winner, Michigan Library Association's Thumbs Up! Award
- Finalist, Ontario Library Association's Red Maple Award
- Finalist, Canadian Children's Book Centre's TD Canadian Children's Literature Award
- Finalist, Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award
- Finalist, Canadian Booksellers Association's Young Readers' Book of the Year
- Finalist, BC Book Prizes's Sheila Egoff Children's Literature Prize
- Finalist, Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Award's Snow Willow Award
- Finalist, The Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Awards

APPENDIX:

Common Core State Standard

Writing

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

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

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3d Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate

Language

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.4c Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

Reading: History

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

There are two sides to every story.

Journal Entries as Storytelling

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

Character Traits

Proof

Trait

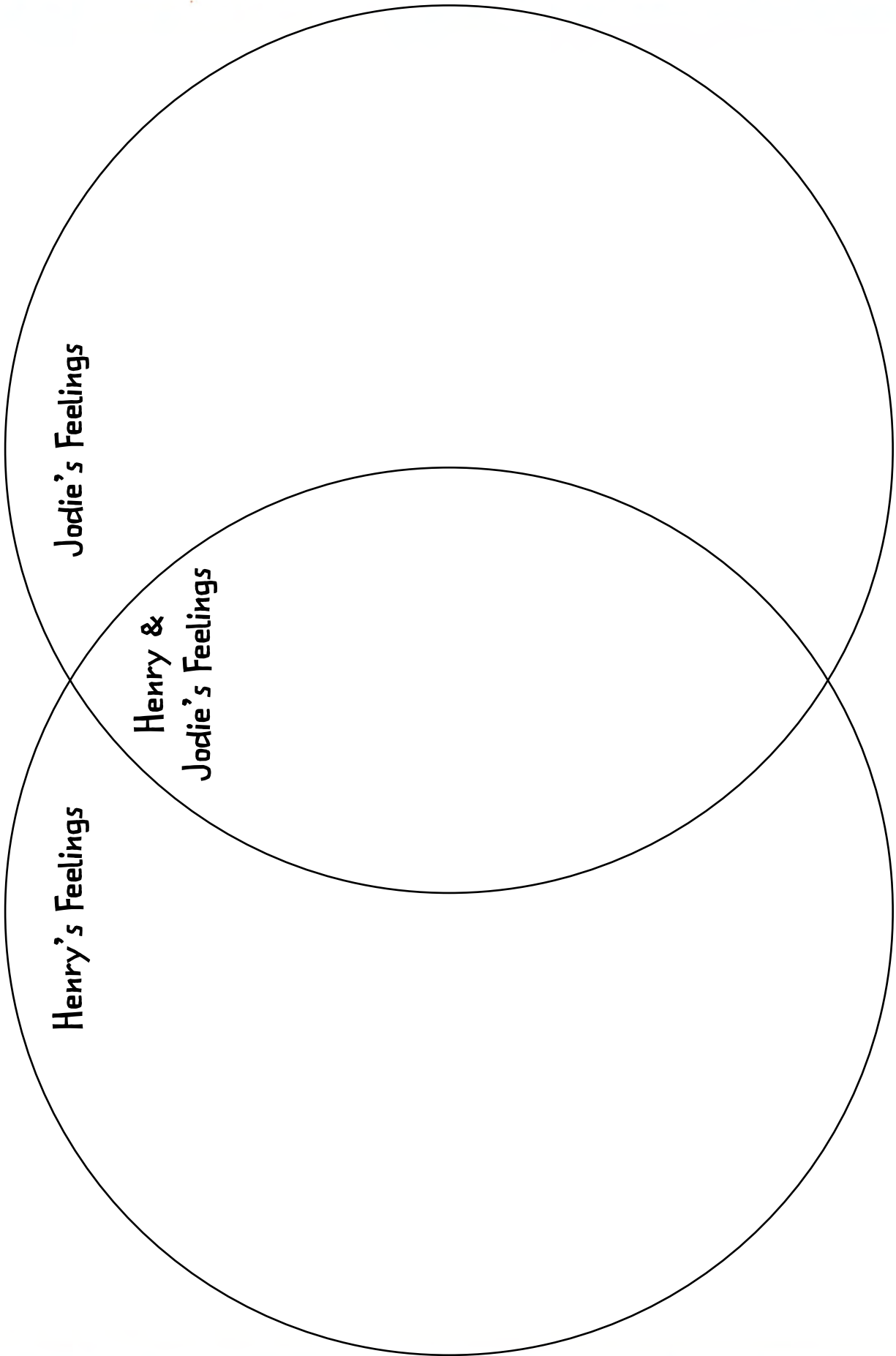
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Trait

Proof

Trait

Henry and Jodie



Sympathy Vs. Empathy

Character Development

Character Name:	After:
Stereotype:	

Character Name:	After:
Stereotype:	

Character Name:	After:
Stereotype:	

Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders

Bully	Victim	Other